

Grasshopper Jungle Study Guide

Grasshopper Jungle by Andrew Smith

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Plot Summary

“Good books are about everything,” writes Austin Szerba, narrator of the novel “Grasshopper Jungle” by Andrew Smith. The teenager, who considers himself an amateur historian, has taken it upon himself to record the history of his life, which turned out to include the end of the world. The novel also addresses issues like ancestry, religion, sexual orientation, friendship and the lifecycle of a strange form of mold that turned humans into over-sized, man-eating indestructible bugs.

Austin’s story began when he and his best friend, Robby Brees, were beaten up while smoking and skating in the alleyway behind the Ealing Mall, an area they called Grasshopper Jungle. The boys, Grant Wallace and some others from Hoover High School, threw Robby and Austin’s shoes and skateboards on top of the roof of the Ealing Mall as an additional insult. After the fight, Robby tried to write the message “GRANT WALLACE MURDERED ME” on the pavement behind the mall using the blood coming from his nose.

Later that night when Austin and Robby went back to Grasshopper Jungle to retrieve their things from the roof of the mall, they found the roof access trap door that led into the secondhand store where Austin worked part time. Austin decided to see what his boss, Johnny McKeon, was hiding in his office. They found a globe filled with some sort of writhing, glowing mass labeled “Contained Plague 412E”; along with other globes containing a pair of hands, a penis and a two-headed baby boy. While there, they are surprised by Grant Wallace and his friends. Austin and Robby hid while Grant and the other boys looked at the things in the office. They took the globe with the glowing mass.

As they left the mall building, Grant and his friends dropped the globe containing the mass on top of the blood from Robby’s earlier nosebleed. These four boys, along with three other people who happen to be in the alley in the course of the next few hours, were infected with this strange plague that made them hatch into huge, man-eating praying mantis like creatures that only want to eat and have sex.

Meanwhile, Robby and Austin found a teletype machine inside the wall of their friend Shann Collin’s house. The machine was typing a message telling them the 412E plague had been detected in the atmosphere and they were to go to the silo. The three went exploring and found an underground shelter with an opening where a silo had once been on the farm. The shelter had everything a human population would need to survive. A welcome film introduced them to the shelter, named the Eden Project, and outlined the history of McKeon Industries, a plant that had once been the biggest employer in Ealing.

In an effort to produce Unstoppable Soldiers for the department of defense, scientists at McKeon Industries had produced the mass that caused humans to turn into huge praying mantis like bugs that ate humans. Dr. Grady McKeon, the founder of the company, gave instructions on an introduction to Eden film that the only way to kill the Unstoppable Soldiers was by shooting them with the blood of the human host of the



plague. In this case, that person was Robby, as it was his blood in Grasshopper Jungle that allowed the plague to active. Although they gave it their best effort, the boys were not successful in reclaiming the town of Ealing from the massive insects. With Shann's parents and Robby's mother and her boyfriend, they start a new life and human species in Eden.



Part 1: Ealing; Kimber Drive – Curfew

Summary

In the introduction to Part 1, narrator and main character Austin Szerba writes that what is to follow in this book is his history.

In the section “Kimber Road” Austin believes the crew that made Kimber Road followed the trail that he and his friend, Robby Brees, made riding bikes through a field they called the Grasshopper Jungle. A mall had been built on the road but about a year ago shops began closing. As a tenth-grader, Austin’s biggest plans were to have sex with his girlfriend, Shann Collins, in the back of Robby’s Ford Explorer.

In “Fixing Feet” the two rode skateboards behind the strip mall. In the alleyway behind a closed podiatrist’s office Robby noted that it was a bad business plan to fix feet in a town people were “dying to run away from (p. 10).” They talked about starting a business involving Austin’s thigh-high stack of notebooks filled with recordings of his history. Austin was fascinated with history and the way things that happened in different times and places could affect lives both miles and years away. A bull in Tsarist Russia, Austin writes, may have contributed to the end of the world. He explains that his great-great-great-grandfather had been exiled from his home and was on his way to Siberia when the train on which he was riding struck a bull and derailed. Andrzej was thought to be dead but he lived and attributed his survival to a Saint Casimir medal he wore. One of Andrzej’s sons, Krzys, wound up near Ealing.

In the section “Louis Asks a Rhetorical Question,” While Robby and Austin were smoking and talking in the alley, four boys from Herbert Hoover High School accused them of being homosexual, beat them up, and threw their shoes and skateboards onto the roof of the mall. They stopped only when Louis, the Chinese cook from The Pancake House, came out and asked what they were doing.

In the section “There’s Blood on Your Spam,” Austin told Robby he had blood on his shirt that featured Hormel Spam. Robby tried to write the title of the next section “GRANT WALLACE MURDERED ME” on the pavement of the alleyway with the blood from his nose but only made it as far as the first “A” in Wallace. The boys washed their shirt and socks in the launderette then walked back to Robby’s apartment to get his Ford Explorer. They decided to go back to the mall later that night to get their shoes and skateboards.

In the section “What Made This Country Great,” Robby had a married, older sister while Austin’s older brother was in Afghanistan in the military. Austin’s father taught history while Robby’s had run off and not returned. Both Robby and Austin’s mothers took little blue pills to help with anxiety.



In the section “Shann’s New Old House,” Austin writes that Ealing was known for a series of decapitations in the 1960s as well as McKeon Industries, the plant that employed half the population of the town until it was forced to shut down six months prior. Dr. Grady McKeon, founder of the plant, was gone. His younger brother, Johnny, along with his new wife, Wendy, and stepdaughter, Shann, were moving into the mansion once built by Grady McKeon.

In the section “Going Somewhere You Shouldn’t Go,” Shann, Robby and Austin walked around Shann’s empty house feeling as if they were in a set for a horror movie.

The section “Robby’s Volcano,” Austin remembered how he’d fallen in love with Shann when he was in seventh grade, the same year he began having “eruptions.” Robby taught Austin how to dance so Austin could impress Shann at the Curtis Crane Lutheran Academy End-of-the-Year Mixed-Gender Mixer. At the same time, Robby told Austin he was homosexual.

Shann told her friends she believed her house was infested by demons in the section “Doors that Go Somewhere; Doors that Go Nowhere.” There are two doors in her bedroom. One opened to display a brick wall. The other opened to a down staircase that ended at a brick wall. As Shann and Austin sat alone on the down staircase, Shann told Austin she was going to come with them to get their things from the mall roof.

In the section “Curfew,” Austin told his mother and father a partial truth about what he would be doing that night.

Analysis

The author introduces the setting of the novel and its three main characters in this first section of the first part of the novel. Austin Szerba, one of the main characters and narrator of the novel, is obsessed with history and recording his history. Robby Brees, the second of the main characters, is Austin’s best friend. He is homosexual and seems to have a crush on Austin. Shann Collins is Austin’s girlfriend. Despite Robby’s crush on Austin, he taught Austin how to dance and introduced him to Shann when they were in the seventh grade. In the time period in which the novel began, the three were in the tenth grade and attended Curtis Crane Lutheran Academy.

The three lived in the fictional town of Ealing, Iowa. Because the plant, McKeon Industries, had shut down about six months before the action of the first section of the novel, people were abandoning the city. The plant had once employed about half the population there. As the novel continues, McKeon Industries and the work done there will become an important topic in the novel. For now, note that the plant had once worked with the Department of Defense during the Cold War. After the Cold War was over, it began making showerheads and toothbrushes.

Another major theme to be noticed in this section of the novel is Austin’s obsession with history. He seems particularly engrossed with the idea that although people record history with the hopes of not repeating it, people keep doing the same stupid things over



and over. Austin also is interested in his own history as he shares the story of his great-great-great grandfather in the section "Fixing Feet." Notice also that throughout the book, Austin will list things that happened at the same time or the same year that had a direct affect on other things that happened at that same time. For instance, in the seventh grade, Austin's brother joined the Marines; Shann and Austin started dating; Robby's dad left to film a volcano in Guatemala, met another woman and never came back; Austin learned Robby was homosexual; and Austin began having ejaculations. He describes the time as confusing.

In order to further the idea that all things are connected; the author will often use a similar word or image over and over. For instance, Austin writes about Robby's father going to film a volcano erupting in Guatemala. Austin later refers to his own ejaculations as "eruptions." As he talks about Robby's announcement that he is homosexual, Austin writes there was nothing wrong with Robby's "volcano" referring to his penis. Notice also Austin's use of the phrase "it was a good idea" in this section of the novel. This phrase, along with the similar one, "it was not a good idea," will echo again and again through the novel.

Notice the dry sense of humor the author uses in his writing. The humor is understated and it involves the situations in life that one can't help but laugh at. Austin's delivery of his history is serious, for instance he connects the dying bull in Tsarist Russia with the end of the world decades later that began in Ealing, Iowa, yet at the same time the reader can catch the humor in the situation he describes. The author of the novel also uses a good deal of simile, particularly involving country living. For instance, he describes Poland in the time of Austin's great-great-great grandfather as being like "a sausage in the dog jowls of selfish neighboring empires." He describes the new mall as "a row of happy lower teeth" that began "blackening out like cavities" when the people began leaving town. The author plays on this simile as he personifies the mall saying it "grinned for awhile."

Notice in this section of the novel the first mention of the Saint Casimir medal. Austin's great-great-great grandfather believed it was this medal that kept him from being killed when the train on which he was riding derailed following his exile from his hometown. Notice also Robby's claim that there were probably some cool things on top of the roof of the mall. Although it doesn't seem so now, this statement is ironic because the boys will find some interesting things on the roof although they won't realize the significance of those items until much later in the novel. Remember also Robby's act of writing in blood on the pavement of Grasshopper Alley. This will be significant later on in the novel.

Another theme introduced in this section of the novel is Austin's struggle with his developing sexuality. He, like most other teenage boys, has realized what his penis does and was obsessed with sex. He had a girlfriend with whom he wanted to have sex but also feels a confusing love toward his best male friend, Robby. Even though Shann hung out with both the boys, she sensed Austin's confusion and asked him about it but could get no straight answer.



Discussion Question 1

Discuss the author's style of writing thus far in the novel. What literary devices do you see him using? How does the author build the tone of the novel?

Discussion Question 2

How had the closing of McKeon Industries affected Ealing? Use examples from the book.

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the similarities between Austin and Robby and their home lives.

Vocabulary

genetically, predisposed, pungent, exiled, imposition, rhetorical, diversion, pointillist, ominous, notoriously, suave, decapitation, decrepit, monstrosity, mausoleum, unexpurgated, expatriated, infatuated, smitten, demonic, infestations, liberate, intervene, projectiles, concocted



Part 1: Ealing; Stupid People Should Never Read Books – History is Full of Shit

Summary

In the section, “Stupid People Should Never Read Books,” Austin writes about the series of events that led to his first kiss from Shann. He’d been called into the headmaster’s office for writing a report about the book “The Chocolate War” which included references to Catholic boys who masturbated. The headmaster lectured Austin on the physical and spiritual weakness caused by masturbation. He blamed armies losing wars and homosexuality on masturbation. Both the boys and girls were given talks about the subject because of Austin’s report. After the lectures, Shann slipped Austin a note telling him she loved “The Chocolate War” and wanted to hang out with him. They kissed later that day.

In the section “The Death-Ray Gun” Austin climbed into the backseat of Austin’s Explorer with Shann while Robby went to get more cigarettes from his mom. Holding Shann in the back of the vehicle, Austin told her he loved her. She said she loved him. At that moment, Robby returned to the car and demanded Austin get back in the front.

In “Robby Could Have Been a Preacher” Shann, Austin and Robby ate at Stan’s Pizza. The next section “Never Name a Pizza Joint Stan’s” Shann waited in the vehicle while Austin and Robby went after their things. On the roof, the two looked at the Stan’s Pizza Sign that someone had defaced so it read Satan’s Pizza. Along with their shoes and skateboards Austin and Robby also found a pink plastic flamingo, two bottles of wine, two reels of 16 mm film and a lemur mask.

In the section “If You Ever Want to Get Shot in Ealing” Robby asked Austin for permission to kiss him. Austin reluctantly agreed. In the next section “The Trapdoor” Austin tried not to think about how he might let Robby kiss him again sometime. As he thought, Robby found the roof access trapdoor for Johnny McKeon’s stores. When Austin stood up, Robby noticed his erection even though Austin tried to hide it. The two boys climbed down the ladder.

In the section “Hungry Jack” Austin worked part time in the secondhand store From Attic to Seller that belonged to Shann’s stepfather. Austin felt very uncomfortable entering the store without permission. In the section “Johnny’s Things” Austin and Robby made their way through the store to Johnny’s office. The office was locked, but Austin knew there was a key hidden on the door facing.

In the section “Two-Headed Boy” Robby and Austin were shocked by the things they found stored in the glass globes in the office. In one of them, labeled McKeon Industries



1969 Contained MI Plague Strain 412E, was a black, folded mass that pulsed and twitched. Other globes contained a replica of a human head, a pair of hands, a penis and testicles, and a two-headed male fetus. There were also sealed glass cases with bugs the size of children along with huge parts of bugs. These cases identified the bugs as the Unstoppable Soldier. Before they could leave, Austin and Robby heard someone outside the office.

In the section "Blue Light" Robby turned off the office light but the black mass continued to glow with a blue light. Austin and Robby huddled together under Johnny's desk. They heard Grant Wallace's voice. He and his three friends had apparently broken into the building with the intent of robbing the liquor store. First, they looked in Johnny's office and took the mass that glowed blue with them. As soon as they were gone, Austin and Robby ran for the roof.

In the section "Priorities" Robby and Austin's first priority once they got on the roof was to smoke a cigarette. When they gathered their stuff and prepared to go down, Austin told Robby not to mention anything to Shann. Robby asked if he was not to mention anything about them kissing or the specimens in the office.

In the section "Hell Breaks Loose" Shann was still sleeping when Austin and Robby got back in the vehicle. As they drove away, the boys saw a glowing globe exit the mall building. They watched as the globe dropped and splattered on the pavement. Grant and the other three boys became the first victims of the once contained plague that had been in the glass globe. Travis and Eileen Pope became the next two victims when they picked up and threw away the pieces of glass from the broken globe. Hungry Jack, a homeless man who ate from the dumpster in which the glass was disposed, also became a victim.

In the section "History is Full of Shit" Austin tries to record what had happened that night, but he realized his account of the details was an abbreviation, as was most of history. He argues even cave dwellers abbreviated their history. His name, Austin writes, was an abbreviation of the original Polish name of Szczerba because United States customs took out some of the letters when Krzys Szczerba arrived there. His father had died on the boat and was buried at sea with a Saint Casimir medallion. Krzys, now named Christopher, married Eva Nightingale. This section ends with a description of what was happening when Austin went to bed, at the time the end of the world was four hours old. Austin writes it would take a week for he and Robby to figure out that the plague wouldn't have been harmful had it not come in contact with human blood. When Tyler dropped the globe onto the area of the pavement where Robby had tried to write out a message in the blood from his nose the plague was activated.

Analysis

Although Austin writes about things like the impending end of the world, it is hard to put a finger on the tone of the novel as it seems contradictory signals are being given. With the main character of the novel being a teen boy who was struggling with finding his



sexual identity, getting lectures about writing a report on a book that made references to masturbation, and being bullied, it is hard to believe his claims that the end of the world was coming are serious. These references to the end of the world can be chalked up to teenage hyperbole, a young boy over emphasizing events that aren't really as bad as they seem.

As a teenaged boy, Austin was intrigued by his sexuality and the messages that he receives about his sexuality from figures of authority. Because he attended a private Lutheran School, sex was a taboo there. Masturbation was particularly forbidden. Austin writes about how the urinals at the school showed pictures of praying hands at the boys' eye levels. These pictures were to remind boys what they were supposed to do with their hands. Austin comments in his dry humor that the globes in Johnny's office containing the hands that looked like they were praying and the severed penis were a visual demonstration of what the boys were told would happen to them if they masturbated. Meanwhile, Austin saw through the propaganda his headmaster tried to feed him about men who masturbated excessively. The headmaster told him that whole armies of men were defeated because masturbation had made them physically and spiritually weak. Even though he realized what the headmaster was telling him probably wasn't true, Austin dutifully recorded his history. In this section Robby asked Austin if he could kiss him. After the kiss, Austin was surprised that he liked Robby's kiss and would consider allowing him to kiss him again. Referring to the level of stigma against homosexuals in their hometown, Austin told Robby that if they wanted to get shot in Ealing, they could kiss each other in someone's back yard. This experimentation, another word that the author will use frequently in the novel, led Austin to be even more confused about his sexual orientation.

Notice the continued use of dry humor in this section of the novel as Austin credits the people of Ealing as being creative for the way they came up with names for businesses like the Topsy Cricket Liquor Store and From Attic to Seller Consignment Store. He additionally indicated Stan had a good sense of humor when he left his defaced sign reading "Satan's Pizza" when the man was just probably tired of cleaning his sign. Notice also Austin's reference to his level of comfortability as he walked through Johnny's store without permission. Again, it is a simile. He describes himself as feeling at "home there as one would lying in their own coffin."

Remember Robby's comment that if they ever wanted to get shot, they should walk through Ealing wearing lemur masks like the one they found on the roof. Remember also the headmaster's act of being disgusted by the idea of masturbation and homosexuality, as this will be important later in the novel. Notice also the continued use of the words "volcanoes" and "erupting" to describe the mass on Johnny's desk. Also adding a connection is Austin's comparison of himself and Robby to the two-headed boy in the glass globe as they huddle together under the desk in Johnny's office as they wait for Grant Wallace and the other boys to leave.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Austin say that all of history is abbreviated? What is the result of this abbreviation?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss sexual experimentation as it has been portrayed in the novel thus far.

Discussion Question 3

How does the author use humor in the novel?

Vocabulary

ulterior, emphatically, deftly, eponymous, prohibition, pretense, virile, indigenoussness, strategic, obligated, glassine, serpentine, deterrent, perilously, translucent, salvaged, lacquered, animated, gelatinous, trite, disembodied, mesmerized, pirouette, speculation, rhetoric, delinquent, repository, disintegrated, compulsion



Part 2: Waterloo Cornfield; Palindromes – Skating and Kayaking

Summary

In the section “Palindromes” Austin notes that all the men in his family were cigarette smoking Catholics until his father married his mother, stopped smoking and became Lutheran. He’d decided that after he talked to his father about his sexual confusion, he was going to change his name and take back the consonants removed from it when his family first came to America. When his father woke him up the morning after he’d kissed Robby, however, Austin decided against talking to his father about his sexual confusion since he was naked under the sheets. He had a text from Robby apologizing when he checked his phone. Austin made arrangements for them to meet at Stan’s Pizza (Satan’s) at 5 p.m.

In the section “A Bath, A Shave, and Modesty” Austin called Shann while he was taking a bath. She told him she’d slept well but that at 6 a.m. she’d heard a sound like a typewriter in her wall. At same time, Hungry Jack was being infested with the plague, Austin notes. Austin’s mother was calm as she drove him to work. He knew she’d taken one of he Xanax pills.

In the section “Johnny and Ollie” Johnny told Austin he had to go to Waterloo to pick up supplies to fix the hole in the wall where the store had been broken into the previous night. He was leaving Austin in charge. When Austin asked if anything was taken, Johnny told him a display globe containing a photoluminescent mold made by the McKeon Industries scientists was gone.

In “The Patch Job” Austin explains that his job as a historian is to tell the truth about what he had experienced with all of the unnecessary details cut out. As he helped Johnny measure the hole that needed patching, Austin asked more questions about the stuff in Johnny’s office. Johnny explained he didn’t know about any of it. He’d thrown some away, kept some in his office, and even put some on the roof, though he didn’t know why he’d put it up there. Before they finished, Austin asked Johnny if he could take Shann on a date. Johnny gave permission and agreed to drive them.

In the section “Say Please” Austin visited Ollie who worked at the liquor store in order to buy cigarettes. Ollie was busy playing video games, his work pastime. In “A Snapshot” as Austin was talking to Shann on the phone and asking her to the movies, a family of tourists entered the shop. Shann told him the ticking noise was happening again. It was noon. Austin heard the noise over the phone and also believed it sounded like typing. He notes the end of the world had been in progress for ten hours.

In “Haggled” the female tourist in the family tried to strike a deal with Austin on the items she wanted to buy but Austin made her pay full price, saying he didn’t have authority to



haggle. It turned out the family was on a road trip to visit places where serial killings had taken place. The father pulled out a shiny book and read out loud about seven decapitations discovered in Ealing in 1969.

In the section “The Boy in the Glass” Austin talked to Robby by phone. He couldn’t shake the feeling that something major had happened the day before. Walking back to Johnny’s office, Austin looked at the stand from which Tyler had taken the globe of plague strain 412E. He thought for the first time that Grant and his friends might get sick. He didn’t think the disease would be incurable, however, as it came from 1969. Austin talked to the boy inside the jar. He was shocked when he saw its hands twitch.

In “Skating and Kayaking” when Austin and Robby met behind Stan’s Pizza, Robby told Austin everything looked normal in Grasshopper Jungle. Austin told Robby about the two-headed boy waving his fingers at him. Robby told Austin he was probably seeing things because he was traumatized. They decided to get drunk together on Monday night. Austin wanted to try one of this mother’s Xanax pills, which he called kayaks, as well. Robby offered to take Austin to Shann’s house. Austin had expected him to be disappointed because he wasn’t invited to the movies with them but Robby said he understood.

Analysis

Apart from the references to the time that has passed since the beginning of the end of the world, nothing seems much different in Ealing the morning after the mold in Johnny’s office was broken out of its protective globe. The mentions of the end of the world along with Austin’s belief that the two-headed boy in the jar moved when he put his hand on the glass make the tone of the novel more creepy and give it a tinge of a science fiction slant. The strange noises coming from behind Shann’s wall, however, give the story a hint of a ghost story feeling.

Austin continued to stress over his identity, both as a person and in his sexual orientation, in this section of the novel. He wanted to ask his father for guidance but decided it was too uncomfortable, as he was wearing no clothes under the bed sheet. He has pointed out that before his father, all of his male relatives were cigarette-smoking Catholics. His father changed to the Lutheran religion when he met Austin’s mother. It almost seems that Austin felt some resentment from the way that his family had changed over the years, particularly the way his father had changed. Austin indicates that he wanted to add the consonants back to his name that had been taken away when Krzys had originally come to America. Austin also seems frustrated that his ancestors were Catholic, but he wasn’t allowed to believe in saints. He points this out as he describes the way Ollie ate donuts. He writes the man could have been considered the patron saint of eating donuts, however, Austin writes as a Lutheran, he wasn’t allowed to believe in saints. It seems this rule stating he couldn’t give praise to the saints frustrates him, as Saint Casimir was such an important figure in his great-great-grandfather’s life. Austin also writes that just as he wasn’t allowed to believe in the saints, he also did not believe in Jesus.



As he tells his story, notice that Austin uses the same phrases again and again to underline the connections and the cyclical nature of history. He writes of things falling into place, which he pairs with the statement that it has been proved that gravity works, an example of the writer's dry sense of humor. Everything falls into a place, Austin writes and uses Dr. Grady McKeon's plane crash as an example. "You know what I mean," is another phrase used often in the book as if it is synonymous with 'etc.' or 'so on and so on'. Another phrase that will appear in the book again is the one that states "good books are always about everything."

Austin admitted to himself he'd really not thought about Grant and his friends getting sick from the globe they'd stolen until the word "plague" set in with him the following morning. Even then, it is hard for the reader to take this idea of the boys getting sick as Austin follows the idea up with the statement that nothing incurable could have come from the 1960s. He thinks that a generation that produced singing groups like the Beatles and the Stones couldn't have produced anything incurable.

The fact that Austin is writing this story from some point after the end of the world becomes clear as he helped Johnny cover the hole made by Grant and his friends. Austin indicates it was ironic that Johnny would think the same people might break in again as these people wouldn't have the opportunity to break in again even if the hole in the wall was not fixed. Austin could not have known this unless he was writing from some point in the future.

Notice also in this section of the novel that Johnny told Austin most of the stuff in his office came from experiments done at McKeon Industries. In a prior section of the novel, Austin had already discussed experiments in the context of his own sexuality. He believes that experiments are done with some general idea about the outcome. In this context, one has to wonder what type of experiments the people at McKeon Industries were doing when they created a plague, man sized bugs, and a two headed boy. Notice also that Johnny told Austin he'd put some of the stuff from his brother's office onto the roof of the mall. This will be significant later in the novel.

In the theme of history, Austin makes some interesting and valid points about history. He points out that everyone trusts history because it was omniscient. People never questioned how a person knew something, or found something out, that happened before they were born. The main point that Austin seems to be making about history is that the general public had to trust the historian. Along with his other repeated phrases, Austin continually repeats that he's telling the truth and that the reader has to trust him. As historian, however, Austin argues his job is only to tell what happened, not why it happened.

Discussion Question 1

Why was Austin's desire to go back to the traditional Polish spelling of his name significant?



Discussion Question 2

What was the significance of Austin and Robby's smoking habits?

Discussion Question 3

Consider Austin's obsession with history. Do you think he makes a valid point when he writes that people trust historians too blindly? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

palindromes, despised, evolved, concession, salvaged, demeanor, omniscient, unimpeachable, sublime, morbid, dictated, curtness, allure, spastic, insinuate, expedition, virile, snarled, retardant, carcinogenic, traumatized



Part 2: Waterloo Cornfield; Eden Five Needs You – The Thing in the Cornfield

Summary

In the section “Eden Five Needs You” Austin describes the movie he and Shann watched on their date. In the movie, aliens abducted a teenager to their planet, called Eden Five, to use his sperm to start a new population of humans on that planet. Not wanting to be responsible for an entire new species of human mess-ups, the teen stole a spacecraft and went back to Earth for his best friend. The U.S. President, who was mad because his sperm wasn’t being used to start the new species, sent an aircraft full of frozen embryos to shoot down the teens’ aircraft. During the movie, Shann and Austin made out. He was surprised and embarrassed when he had an erection when she rubbed him during the movie.

Austin also includes that in Ealing, the seven people who had come in contact with the plague had become very sick and were bumping into things. As he was getting in bed just after midnight, Austin got a call from Shann who was hearing the typing in her wall again. He told her that he and Robby would find out what it was tomorrow after church.

In the section “An Awful Lot of Math” Shann told Austin and Robby the typing sounds had been coming every six hours at 12 and 6. They found the exact spot on the wall from which the sound was coming and pulled a board from the wall. They discovered a teletype machine that had been typing a message telling them they should report to the silo as the flamingo had registered a presence of the 412E plague in the atmosphere.

In “Tally-Ho!” Austin and Robby disconnected the teletype machine and took the printout with them when they left Shann’s house. They drove to the Tally-Ho!, a gay bar in Waterloo. Robby wanted to see what was inside. In the section “The Inner Tomb” even though they were underage, Robby and Austin stepped inside the bar. Austin described the atmosphere as being quiet and mournful. No one there seemed to have noticed when the boys came in or that they had left.

In the section “And Here’s Number Five” Austin and Robby sat behind the car and smoked after they left the bar. As they watched the cars on the highway, one pulled up in the lot at the Tally-Ho!. They were surprised when Pastor Roland Duff got out of the car and went into the bar. In the section “Taking Drags” as they continued to smoke, Austin asked Robby if he thought he was homosexual and confessed his confusion. Robby suggested Austin talk to his father.

In the section “A Visitor Comes and Goes” as Robby and Austin finished their cigarettes, Hungry Jack rode up to them on his bike. Robby offered the man a cigarette but Hungry Jack seemed afraid of him. He turned and walked into the highway where he was hit by a truck. The truck never even slowed down.



In the section “The Thing in the Cornfield” both Robby and Austin are sullen the next day at school because they can’t decide what they should tell Shann about what happened to Hungry Jack the night before. They’d found the old man’s destroyed body but he’d begun moving his arms. As they watched, the man split in half, and then a man-sized, six-legged bug crawled out of Hungry Jack’s corpse. They recognized the bug because it was identical to the bug pieces they’d seen in Johnny’s office.

Analysis

At the end of this section of the novel, the story takes a full-on science fiction tone as the homeless man, Hungry Jack, walked in front of and was hit by a speeding truck. Austin and Robby watched as his body split in half and a bug the size of a man came out. Remember that Hungry Jack consumed the plague strain 412E from the piece of pizza that he got out of the dumpster in Grasshopper Alley. Remember also that in Johnny’s office, along with the globe containing the plague, there were preserved pieces of man-sized bugs. After the experience with Hungry Jack, the reader can put together that the plague has something to do with people hatching into man-sized bugs.

After what they’d seen happen to Hungry Jack, Austin and Robby stressed over the best way to tell Shann what happened and why they seemed freaked out without telling her too much. They were able to put together some of the pieces of what was happening because they had seen the things that Johnny had locked in his office. However, in order for them to be able to tell Shann everything they’d seen, they would have to confess to her that they had broken into her step father’s office, an admission they didn’t want to make.

The boys did solve the mystery of the typing sound coming from Shann’s wall in this section of the novel. They discovered a teletype machine that was sending out a programmed message every six hours. Note that the message indicated that the flamingo had detected the presence of 412E in the environment. Remember that Johnny said he put some of the things he received from his brother’s plant on the roof of the building. The reader must wonder if it was the flamingo that Robby took from the mall roof that was the one responsible for sending out the alert to the teletype machine.

Beyond the supernatural things beginning to happen in the novel, the theme of Austin’s sexual confusion continues. On his date with Shann, he accidentally “erupted” when she touched his penis. Note the use of dry humor again when Shann decided to tell Austin why she loved him and Austin thought to himself that it wasn’t for his endurance. Austin talked to Robby about his confusion but the best Robby could do to help him was to suggest he talk to his father. Austin still hadn’t decided yet how or when he should try to start that conversation.

Meanwhile, Robby and Austin visited a homosexual bar just to see what it was like. While the bar was exactly what the two expected it to be, they did not expect to see Pastor Roland Duff going into the homosexual bar. Considering the way that the pastor lectured Austin for doing a report about a book that mentioned masturbation, it seems



he was preaching one thing and practicing another. Note Austin indicated Pastor Roland Duff appeared very comfortable going into the bar, as if he'd been there before.

Discussion Question 1

What do you think the message coming from the teletype in Shann's room meant?

Discussion Question 2

Considering the happenings in this section, are Austin's claim that the end of the world was coming more plausible?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the actions of Pastor Roland Ruff. How does it make you feel that he lectured Austin about becoming a homosexual, yet it appeared he was one?

Vocabulary

abducted, benevolent, genesis, subtlety, anesthetized, perimeter, triangulated, aesthetic, platen, perforated, orgy, entrepreneur, vibrant, boisterous, encapsulated, accentuated, paralytic, concussive, writhed, cleave, mandibles, pivoted



Part 3: The Silo; A Tough Day at Curtis Crane Lutheran Academy – Modern-day Nightingales

Summary

Saint Casimir is the patron saint of Poland and of the young, Austin writes. He never married and was devoted to chastity. Austin wonders if he was sexually confused.

In the section “A Tough Day at Curtis Crane Lutheran Academy” Robby called Austin to join him at Grasshopper Jungle after school. He told him he had something to show him. In the section “And Bugs do Two Things” Austin records how bugs wanted to do only two things, eat and have sex. It was what the bug that crawled out of Hungry Jack wanted to do. In Grasshopper Alley, Robby asked Austin if they were still going to get drunk together, but Austin wasn’t sure. Robby showed him a copy of the Waterloo News and Gazette with a story about Hungry Jack’s death in it. On their way out of the alley, both Austin and Robby noticed the letters Robby had written with the blood from his nose were giving off a faint blue glow.

In the section “A Gift from Johnny McKeon” Johnny saw Austin and Robby as they skated past the front door of his store. He told Austin to wait a minute. He returned with a Saint Kazimierz medal for Austin. Austin put it on immediately. He felt it had magic powers.

In the section “Shann Calls” as he rode to Robby’s apartment, Austin imagined the medal as being the one that was worn by his great-great-great grandfather when he was buried at sea. During the ride, Shann called to tell the boys that she’d found the silo. She made plans for them to meet and look for it after school the following day.

In “My Mom’s Little Blue Kayaks” Austin had stolen two of his mother’s Xanax pills. He took one but Robby refused to do so. As they drank, Austin played with the flamingo they’d gotten off the roof. He suggested the message from the teletype machine might have been talking about that flamingo but Robby didn’t seem to think so. Austin felt very relaxed after having taken the pill. He drew pictures of Robby and the two drank, talked and listened to music.

The next morning Austin woke up sprawled across Robby’s bed in the section “Pages from History.” He was sick and hurried to find the toilet. As he was taking a shower, Robby knocked on the door. Austin asked for a few minutes to finish. He noted that at the same time he was in the shower, Eileen and Travis Pope were hatching out. Also, his brother, Eric, was on the way to a hospital because he’d lost his right leg from the knee down and both testicles in an explosion. Robby sat on his bed in the bedroom and cried.



In “School Prayers” Austin realized that if he wanted things to stay calm and figured out, the way they were when he was taking Xanax, he would have to take those pills all the time. He left the apartment while Robby was in the shower and walked to school. Robby came to class almost late. Austin believed he’d been looking for him. Austin told Shann he was sick, and that they would have to look for the silo on Wednesday. Shann pulled him to her to kiss her. When Austin tried to ask her if they could have sex if he got some condoms, she pushed him away, telling him he was sick.

In the section “The Vice President’s Balls” Austin tried to ask his dad about his sexual confusion but his question came out in such a way that his father thought he was talking about science experiments instead of sexual experiments. Austin wished his brother were still at home, believing he’d feel comfortable talking to him about his confusion. Austin explains that when his parents found out about Eric’s injuries, they’d flown to Germany, leaving him alone at home as they reasoned he needed to stay in school. Austin includes information about the vice president of the United States of America visiting Eric when he returned to America. He also noted the vice president had experimented sexually.

In the section “Modern Day Nightingales” Austin writes about Krzys Szczerba, his great-great grandfather, who made urinals. He named his urinals Nightingales, after his wife whose maiden name was Nightingale. Austin thought of the way his great-great grandfather had made things for other people to pee on. He felt both he and his brother had been peed on so he reasoned they were modern day nightingales.

Analysis

In this section of the novel, Austin’s brother was injured while fighting in Afghanistan. His right leg from the knee down was blown off and he lost both of his testicles as a result of shrapnel. Austin had been thinking just the day prior that it would have been good to have his brother, Eric, there to try to talk to about his sexual confusion. Austin felt his conversation with Eric would have gone better than the one he tried to have with his father.

The theme of Austin’s sexual identity and his confusion continues in this section of the novel, as he was very upset after having spent a night at Robby’s house. The two had drunk wine together and Austin had taken a Xanax, hoping it would help him to come to some sort of decision about his identity. Instead, he’d been relaxed enough that he’d slept in Robby’s bed with him instead of in his sleeping bag on the floor like he usually did. Instead of having things cleared up for him, Austin was more confused than ever. Hoping to find out if he’d like sex with girls as much as he thought he might with a guy, Austin tried to ask Shann if they could have sex but she stopped him in the middle of his question, telling him to go home. To make matters worse, Austin felt as if the Saint Kazimierz medal he was wearing around his neck was burning into his flesh when he tried to ask Shann if they could have sex. Note that Kazimierz was a virgin saint. Austin also tried to talk to his father, as Robby suggested, but his father made him feel even worse about the subject as he pretended not to know what Austin was trying to ask,



then pretended like he was talking about science experiments instead of sexual experiments. Notice in the information that Austin includes about the vice president, he notes that this man had experimented sexually, a bit of information he seems to pay attention to when researching others.

The themes of history and religion are both furthered in this section of the novel. One aspect of the section where Austin's history and religion collided happened when Johnny gave him the Saint Kazimierz medal. Austin realized the medal had great importance to his ancestors. His great-great-great grandfather believed the medal had saved his life. He was buried at sea wearing the medal. In the faith into which Austin was born, however, the worship or acknowledgement of saints was not permitted. He decided to wear the medal to school under his clothing, knowing it would make him feel wicked for wearing the unlawful religious symbol. Notice also that Austin imagined that this medal was the same one that was worn by his ancestor when he was buried at sea. He wanted to believe this was a connection in history in which that same medal had purposefully found its way to him.

Austin continues to share his personal history as he tells of his great-great grandfather Krzys who manufactured urinals. He believes it was ironic that his ancestor made his money by making things for people to pee on. Along these same lines, Austin called himself and his brother modern day urinals. Just something else to pee on.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Austin was so upset after he left Robby's house the morning after their sleepover?

Discussion Question 2

Consider the significance of Austin's brother being sexually mutilated by the bomb blast. Why was this important in the novel?

Discussion Question 3

What did Austin think about the Saint Kazimierz medal that Johnny gave him? Why did he decide to wear it?

Vocabulary

chastity, empathize, coherent, controversies, premonition, transient, brutalized, obligated, reproach, bauble, theoretically, antics, voluptuous, serenely, precise, refractive, concupiscent, venture, liaison, seclusion, choreographed



Part 3: The Silo; Shann, The Horny Polish Kid, and Satan – Gimmie Shelter

Summary

In the section “Shann, The Horny Polish Kid, and Satan,” Johnny visited Austin, bringing him cigarettes. He took Austin and Shann to get pizza. Austin felt guilty talking to Shann at first because he was thinking about all the things he did with Robby. He felt as if his heart was being split in half. When Shann did ask Austin about Eric, he told her that he knew his brother would be a different person when he saw him again. He could not eat any more after that. He was crying. Shann suggested to him they could try having sex with a condom sometime when the time was right. She changed the subject by pulling the black and white picture of her house out of her purse.

In the section “Four Photographs” Austin writes about four photographs. The first photo was of the McKeon silo. The second picture was one of Austin and his brother in Canada. The next two pictures Austin writes about were of the two other soldiers who were killed when his brother was injured. He describes them as they looked when they were children. Austin notes that one of the men, Paavi Seppanen, was homosexual.

Shann told Austin she found the McKeon silo in the section “The President’s Sperm.” She said the foundation of the silo was still there with a circular hatch in the center. In the section “The Virgin Saint and His Ward,” Austin heard a siren as he finished his writing for the night. Ollie had called the police to report that a man had been attacked by a wild animal in the parking lot of the liquor store. The man was actually attacked by the bug that had been Hungry Jack.

As he smoked on the front porch, Austin decided to mow his yard and clean up all of Ingrid’s poop as a surprise for his parents when they came back home. He thought of the way Saint Kazimierz died a virgin. He realized he wasn’t comfortable with that idea. As he sat and thought, Robby’s Explorer pulled up to the house. He had brought all the clothes back that he had borrowed from Austin. When they went to his car to get his sleeping bag, Austin noticed Robby had washed all of the dirty laundry from the back seat. Robby tried to say something to Austin about their night together but Austin would not allow him.

In the section “The Diving Bell” Robby, Austin and Shann walked to the foundation of the former silo. Robby began opening the hatch. The room below the hatch was illuminated by fluorescent lights. In the section “The Popular Girl” Austin writes that at the same time they were opening the hatch, his parents were talking to Eric, trying to get him to call Austin. He refused. At the same time, Grant Wallace hatched in his family’s bathroom. On the way out of the house, he ate his mother, siblings and the family dog. The three other boys hatched out moments after Grant. At the same time, the vice president was doing his monthly self-check of his testicles, named Theodore



and Franklin, and Johnny was watching the two headed boy in the jar open and close his hands.

In the section “Welcome to Eden” Shann, Robby and Austin climbed down the ladder into the silo and closed the hatch as directed by an insistent recording. They were overly concerned with the underground area being full of sperm.

In the section “Some Kind of Sign” Austin reasoned that Dr. Grady McKeon built the shelter for some kind of disaster connected to the activities of his company. They walked into what appeared to be a mudroom, and then went into a showering area. There in the bathroom, Austin spotted one of his great-great grandfather’s Nightingale urinals. They found prepared towels and shower kits along with uniform-type jumpsuits and socks. When Robby found a jumpsuit labeled Eden 5, Austin believed it was a sign.

In the section “Gimmie Shelter” all three teens put on jumpsuits. They left the shower area and moved to a large auditorium. A diagram outlining the lifecycle of the 412E plague was written on a chalkboard. There were multiple sets of doorways leading out of the auditorium. The first place the teens found was a lounge area complete with a cigarette machine. Robby found an old reel-to-reel tape recorder. It played Rolling Stones and Mick Jagger music. Shann, Robby and Austin danced together.

Analysis

As this novel progresses, it becomes clear that the author is dealing with the idea that there is good in the world, but that there is also evil in the world. Sometimes this evil outweighs the good. As Austin has mentioned multiple times in his writing, all good books should be about everything. This book is about everything from the love of three friends for each other to an “alien” invasion to the war in Afghanistan. In the section “Four Photographs” the author takes the time to describe Eric as a teen, the way Austin remembered him, as well as the other two men who were killed in the bomb blast. The sidebar doesn’t really seem to serve any purpose in the novel except to put faces on the losses suffered during war. Notice that Austin points out that one of the men killed in battle was homosexual.

Austin continued to struggle with his own sexual identity and confusion. Notice how he incorporates his Polish heritage in his description of his torn heart. He compares his heart to Warsaw, the capital of Poland, which was divided up into different places for different types of people during World War II. He felt as if he were doing the same thing with his heart by giving a place for Shann and a place for Robby. As many do who face the struggle with their sexual identity, Austin felt there was something wrong with him and blamed himself for his inability to be “normal.” It seems through his references to people throughout history who have sexually experimented or who have been homosexual, Austin was trying to find some comfort in the idea that his was not the only one who had struggled with the same questions as he. Notice also in this section that although it was clear that Robby had feelings for Austin, he didn’t seem to mind Austin making out with Shann as he watched them kiss in the lounge of The Eden Project.



Notice that even before they knew the underground shelter was named The Eden Project, Robby and Austin were already joking about it being full of sperm. As more and more is learned about The Eden Project, it will become more and more eerily like the movie *Eden Five Needs You*. Of course, Austin was impressed when he found one of his great-great grandfather's urinals in Eden. He saw it as one more historical connection in his life. He also admitted it was a sign when Robby found an Eden 5 jumpsuit for him to wear. While the teens were enjoying their exploration of the underground shelter, the tone of the novel seems to carry the feeling that a disaster is indeed coming. The news of Eric's injury had already dampened the tone of the novel, especially since Eric was injured in the way he was. It was no coincidence that Austin's brother lost his testicles in a book concerned with sperm, reproduction and sexual identity. One has to wonder how Eric felt about himself since he lost the ability to reproduce.

As the novel progresses, Austin refers more and more to the Saint Kazimierz medal that he had begun wearing. He seemed to be putting more and more faith in this symbol to protect him and keep him strong. He prayed to it, asking the saint to keep him from getting an erection while wearing the thin jumpsuit and talked to it as he sat on his front porch after he learned about Eric's injury. To Austin, Kazimierz was a saint simply because he remained a virgin until his death. With Austin's high raging hormones, it was an ideal that he could not imagine being able to achieve. Austin began referring to his medal so often that Robby commented to him that he would go to Hell for becoming Catholic.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the author includes descriptions of Eric as well as the other two soldiers who were killed when the bomb went off? Why does he choose to describe them as children or teens instead of adults?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the significance of the Saint Kazimierz medal. Why did Austin connect with it so easily?

Discussion Question 3

How might you feel if you discovered a place like The Eden Project?

Vocabulary

ghettoizing, morbidly, obliterated, deranged, subterranean, Paleolithic, paranoia, conform, pedagogues



Part 3: The Silo; The Dragon Parade – Lucky, In Polish Boy Names

Summary

In the section “The Dragon Parade” while the teens were dancing in Eden, the family of tourists who had met Austin in the secondhand store had a picnic lunch in Amelia Jenks, Bloomer Park. One of the twin boys spotted the bugs that had once been Grant Wallace’s friends skittering across the Little League field and believed it was a dragon parade. These bugs, which looked like praying mantises, ate the family of tourists then went on their search for more food and the female bug that had hatched from Eileen Pope. At the same time, Austin’s father left a voicemail for Austin telling him his brother was fine and that he shouldn’t worry. Will Wallace was drinking at the Tally-Ho! and the high school chemistry teacher was buying antihistamines to make methamphetamine. In Grasshopper Jungle, the male bugs were busy mating with the one female bug. Among the six male bugs, they would fertilize millions of the female’s eggs. It was estimated it would take seven days before the bugs would begin hatching and take over the world.

In the section “Soup from Paint Cans” Austin continues his family’s history. His story turns to his great grandfather, Andrew Szerba. This man, like Austin, felt confused about his sexuality. At seventeen, he left home with his pet bird, Baby. At a farm foreclosure auction, he met another man named Herman Weinbach. They talked about going to California to join Herman’s uncle who had a circus act named Bruno’s Amazing and Incredible Dogs. They also talked about setting off to see the world. Austin makes a transition, noting there was a whole world frozen in the 1970s in Shann’s silo. There was a cafeteria with free soda and warehouse full of food.

In the section “Gideon’s Breeding Rights” the other things the teens found in Eden included a gymnasium, a laundry, a hair salon, and dormitories. Robby and Austin realized the place had been built for the breeding of a new species. While Shann offered that Grady McKeon probably had in mind starting everything over, Austin pointed out that even so, even these new people would wind up doing the same stupid stuff other humans had done in the past.

In the section “The Queen of the Universe” the teens found the library in Eden at the same time Eileen was being found by Grant Wallace and his friends. As the bug that had come from Devin Stoddard was pumping semen into Eileen, she turned and ate his head. At that same time, Johnny locked his store and took his trash to the dumpster in the alley where the bugs were.

In “The Library and the New Tally-Ho!” Austin noticed in Eden’s library that all the novels that were there had been written by American men. The library was also equipped with writing desks, pens and logbooks. He told Shann that was where he would write his history of the end of the world. It was difficult for him to concentrate on writing without



having his dog, Ingrid, under his feet, but he drew a bison on the wall above one of the desks. As they continued their tour of Eden, they found a bar, which Robby named the New Tally-Ho!. They also found a medical clinic, a bowling alley and a movie theater.

In “Ventilator Blues” the teens went back to the lounge where they danced some more. At the same time the teens were dancing, Johnny walked out the back door of his store in the section “Something Always Happens While Someone Else Dances.” He dropped his box of trash when he noticed the huge breeding bugs in the back alley. Hungry Jack heard the noise and ran toward Johnny. Johnny fell back through the door of his store and managed to shut it before Hungry Jack could grab him. Meanwhile, Will Wallace had pulled up in front of The Pancake House. He didn’t notice until too late that a big bug was standing there; the bug grabbed and ate him. Inside his store, Johnny activated the new alarm he had installed. In Germany at the same time, Eric tried to call Austin’s cell phone.

In the section “Lucky, In Polish Boy’s Names” Austin continues his history of Andrew and Herman. The two moved themselves into an abandoned farm in Midvale, Iowa. They began sleeping together. The bird began imitating the things they said to one another. In January, Herman became sick with pneumonia and died. Andrew grieved several days before burying the body. Andrew killed his bird before leaving the home because the bird said too many things that could have caused trouble for him. He went and got a job in a butcher shop. He raped Phoebe Hildebrandt, the daughter of the butcher, and then married her when Phoebe got pregnant with Felek Szczerba, Austin’s grandfather.

Analysis

Notice that as the bugs begin eating people and breeding, there is a good deal of foreshadowing included in the novel, especially before a person gets eaten. It can generally be assumed that whenever Austin uses the phrase “It was not a good idea.” someone was about to get eaten. The first time Austin uses the phrase in this section is when he refers to the family of tourists who had their picnic in Amelia Jenks Bloomer Park. Austin builds up his story as if it were just the location of the park and the quality of the water that made the tourists’ stop there not a good idea. At the last moment he changes directions saying the bad water wasn’t what made eating at the park a bad idea because the family was about to get eaten by bugs.

There is foreshadowing that Will, like the rest of his family, will become a bug’s dinner as the author indicates that Will didn’t know he was spending his last night on earth at a homosexual bar. It is assumed at the end of this section when Johnny called the Iowa State Police that at least one policeman would get eaten in the next section as the author ends his narration of Johnny’s activities with “It was not a good idea.”

Austin continues to investigate his sexuality as he thought of having an orgy with Shann and Robby in Eden. He got aroused when he watched Shann kiss Robby. Austin also introduces a relative of his, his great-grandfather, who was homosexual. This man bore



the same first name as Austin's middle name. Austin feels he has a connection with this man and wondered if he also had worn a Saint Kazimierz medallion.

In this section, as Austin thought about the spool of tape in the old fashioned tape recorder, he thought of the way that history often wound around on itself and came full circle. Austin's homosexual great grandfather with the same name is one example of this idea of history winding around on itself. Notice in this section that Austin drew a bison on the wall in the library of Eden, just as cavemen, believed to be the first men to inhabit the Earth did on the walls of their caves. This bison is a symbol of the beginning of time. It will be seen again.

Religion continues to be an issue in this section of the novel. One of the most significant mentions of religion is in the section where Herman told Andrew he was an atheist. The idea that one would deny there was a God was frightening to Andrew. Back in Austin's time, however, notice Shann's reaction when the two boys praised Saint Kazimierz when they found free soda and food in Eden's cafeteria. Somehow she seemed to think that praising a figure from another religion was a form of blasphemy. She had bought into the idea that she had been taught in Lutheran school that saints were not religious figures and deserved no praise. The boys made fun of her feigned righteousness. Austin refers to her as being unwilling to "compromise her unsteady Lutheranism." The boys also pointed out to her that she hadn't even attended church the previous Sunday.

Getting even more deeply into hidden meanings and religion, notice that the purpose of Eden seemed to be very much like Noah's ark. For some reason, either a natural or man caused disaster, it is anticipated the Earth will become inhabitable. Robby and Austin both believed the intent of Eden was to provide a new place for humans to breed and live. In the Biblical story of Noah's ark, God wiped out the population of the Earth, leaving only a few people whom he deemed spiritually pure to survive. If this were the case in the novel, the survivors of Earth would include one heterosexual female, one bisexual male and one homosexual male. While Austin was probably correct in assuming their genetic material would give enough variety they wouldn't have two-headed children, the three of them seem an odd combination with which to begin a new species.

Consider also the idea of the references to condoms in Eden. Austin had previously voiced his opinion that even though humans record their history, they continue to repeat it and do the same stupid things over and over again. His idea is that Adam, the Biblical first man who lived in the Garden of Eden, should have used a condom. However, it is also known that just as Dr. Grady McKeon intended for the inhabitants of his Eden to procreate, so did God with his first humans in Eden. When Austin looked in the drawer of the bedside table in the Eden dormitory, he found a Bible, just as he had in many bedside tables he'd cleaned out for Johnny at the second hand store, but he doesn't find any condoms, another item commonly stowed in these drawers. This led Austin to the realization that there were no condoms in Eden, either the underground shelter or the Biblical garden.



Notice the author's continued use of word play as well as simile. In this section the bug that was once Eileen Pope is described as being "as fertilized as a genetically modified cornfield in Kansas." From this section, remember also Herman's uncle Bruno Wojner and his circus act Bruno's Amazing and Incredible Dogs.

Discussion Question 1

What do you think was the purpose of Eden? Was it just a bomb shelter or was there more to it, as Austin and Robby believed?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the story that Austin tells of his great grandfather, who was homosexual. How does this example fit in with Austin's story?

Discussion Question 3

As they were exploring Eden, the three teens did not know what was happening above ground. How do you think they will react when they learn the havoc that was being wreaked?

Vocabulary

inseminated, burgeoning, palatial, conspired, anarchists, obligation, atheist, derelict, incapable, apex, defacing, luxurious, immaculately, cache, impregnated, refuse, connoisseur, vasectomy, carapace, carnivorous, impersonate, scrounged, solitude



Part 3: The Silo; Movie Night in Eden – The Orphan Felek

Summary

In the section “Movie Night in Eden” Shann, Robby and Austin began watching the Eden Orientation Series. There were only three of the five reels of film in Eden. Austin and Robby realized the other two reels were on the roof of the Ealing Mall. In “The Good Doctor Accounts for History” Austin latched onto Dr. Grady McKeon’s demand that they must breed which he included in the introduction portion of the film. Grady Mckeon affirmed Robby and Austin’s suspicions that he planned a new breed of humans to begin in Eden. As they watched the movie, Shann began to get the idea that Robby and Austin knew more about what was going on that they were telling her.

In the section “Unstoppable Corn! Unstoppable Corn!” the three teens learned that Mckeon Industries were first developed to make fertilizers that would increase corn production. As the industry grew, scientists tried to make corn that could not be eaten by insects. They did this by blending grasshopper sperm with corn pollen. Even though the corn could not be eaten by bugs, it had a side effect that caused the testicles of teen boys to dissolve. Eventually it was discovered that eating as little as an ear and a half of the corn dissolved the testicles of anything that had testicles.

Despite Unstoppable Corn’s perceived failure, the Department of Defense took an interest and asked the company to work on making Unstoppable Weapons and Unstoppable Soldiers. The plan was to find some way to stop the spread of Communism. Scientists worked in human replication where they experimented with the material that caused testicular dissolution. While removing some of the Unstoppable Corn from a silo, scientists found a new variety of mold, an accident of nature, with which they began experimenting. When Austin accidentally exclaimed that the mold was the same stuff they’d found in Johnny’s office, Shann asked when they were in his office.

At this point, Austin writes that the movie turned into a horror show first because scientists mixed Dr. Grady McKeon’s blood with some of the mold, and second because Austin recognized the scientist who was adding the blood to the mold as his grandfather, Felek Szcyrba. He was the first victim of the plague strain 412E. Unfortunately, the Unstoppable Soldiers that the scientists created were huge bugs that wanted to do nothing but eat and have sex. Dr. Grady McKeon said scientists had found one way to stop the bugs, but reel three ended just before he shared that procedure. Robby and Austin knew they had to go back to the roof of Grasshopper Jungle to get the remaining reels.

In the section “The Orphan Felek” Austin tells the story of his grandfather. Felek’s father, Andrzej, was shot while using the bathroom during the war in Italy. He’d joined the U.S.



Army to fight in World War II and to get away from Phoebe, whom he did not love. Felek's mother, Phoebe, remarried after Andrzej's death and had Felek's last name changed to Barton. Phoebe had three more children but none of them belonged to her new husband, Daniel Barton. Felek was enrolled in Stanford University when he was 14 years old. After his graduation from college, he changed his name back to Felek Szczerba. He married Austin's grandmother. Their first child was Austin's father. Although the newspaper reports stated Felek had died in a motorcycle accident, he actually hatched the first Unstoppable Soldier.

Analysis

Austin's history came closer to home as he learned that his grandfather was the first victim of Dr. Grady McKeon's plague intended to turn men into Unstoppable Soldiers. Austin describes the film as turning into a horror story when he saw that his grandfather had worked in the lab with the same man that Austin describes as a psychopath and a butcher. Austin also includes in his description of the doctor a very unfavorable story in which a young Dr. Grady McKeon pushed his younger sister out of a swing simply because he didn't want her there. Austin came to the conclusion that Dr. Grady McKeon thought he was God. The only part of the doctor's film presentation the teens have seen so far that Austin liked was Dr. Grady McKeon's insistent call for them to breed.

Notice also how the author plays with the meanings of the word "experiment" in this section of the novel. Austin had already used the word to describe what he has done with Robby as sexual experimentations, so the reader already knows what Austin has in mind when he heard the word experiments. While Robby was trying to get the film projector in the Eden theater working (experimenting with it) Austin indicated he wanted to go with Shann to the dormitories so they could experiment sexually there. Austin later had to include information that the scientists at McKeon Industries were experimenting with corn, a phrase he was afraid he might have to later remove from his history because the idea was just too ludicrous for him. Notice again that Austin uses one of his "good idea" phrases as he describes the scientists' experiments with the corn. It can be assumed that these experiments turned out badly.

Notice also the author continues to use farm related simile as he makes his descriptions. For instance Dr. Grady McKeon is described as having a "twitching right eyeball as big as an Ozark watermelon" at one point in the film. He's also accused of having the same expression on his face as a doctor "just before he grabs your balls and tells you to cough." This reference to testicles leads to another subject with which the author has a good deal of fun. It turned out the corn made by McKeon Industries caused testicular dissolution, which Austin says is a less traumatic way of describing what was happening to the people who ate the corn. As Austin presents the information about the dissolving testicles, he builds on the original claim that the corn would dissolve the balls of teens boys who ate it with more and more specifics that were more and more humorous and show what a huge error the McKeon scientists had made until he climaxes his thought process with the idea that just a small amount of the corn would



dissolve the balls of anything male that ate it. Remember the ball dissolving properties of the corn as they will become significant later in the novel.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the Unstoppable Corn was given to Canada specifically? How would Americans hope to benefit from sterile Canadians?

Discussion Question 2

Why was it significant to Austin that his grandfather was the man who became the first Unstoppable Soldier?

Discussion Question 3

Why are all five reels of film not in the movie theater in Eden? What purpose would the author have in making the boys have to go back up to the surface of the Earth to get the film reels before they could find out how to kill the Unstoppable Soldiers?

Vocabulary

venues, indoctrinated, mandates, celluloid, habitable, notorious, directive, depicted, profiteers, dissolution, lucrative, theoretical, archived, splice, pulsated, defective, interminably



Part 4: The End of the World; We, The New Humans – On the Roof Again

Summary

In the introduction to this part of the novel, Austin gives some background information on Saint Kazimierz. He angered his father when he was 13 by not wanting to go to war against the Hungarians because he thought the war was unjust. He also wore a hair shirt to help him deal with sexual temptation.

In the section “We, the New Humans” Austin told Shann what had happened the night they’d gone to Ealing Mall to get their shoes and skateboards from the roof. He told her about watching Hungry Jack hatch. After Austin told Shann what they knew, the boys took Shann home. As Austin kissed her outside her door, Shann told Austin she thought Robby loved him. Austin asked if something was wrong with that and Shann backed away in surprise, asking if they’d ever done anything. He felt he couldn’t lie to her, so he said yes when she asked if they had kissed but told her they hadn’t had sex. She went inside and locked the door.

In the section “Last Legs” Robby didn’t ask any questions, only slid a pack of cigarettes across the dash to Austin when he got back in the car. Austin got his history books and Ingrid, his dog, when Robby drove him home in “Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone never wore Coonskin Caps.” He listened to a voice mail his brother had left on his cell phone. In the message, Eric called Austin “Booney,” a name he’d starting using after a family trip to Nashville when Austin bought a fake coonskin cap that he wore nonstop. Austin also remembered two prostitutes in the hotel room next to theirs had given Eric a blow job. He also had a voice mail from Shann. She said simply that he was disgusting. Robby put his hand on Austin’s shoulder when he started crying.

In the section “Garlic, Dr. Pepper and Crystal Meth” Robbie stopped at his apartment to get some stuff. Austin waited with Ingrid in the car. Ollie Jungrau watched as Robby ran to his apartment. Ollie peed on himself when saw the bug that was Hungry Jack walk down the street outside his apartment. At the same time, Duane Coventry was finishing smoking his third rock of crystal meth. He got up to check to be sure his doors were locked. He walked outside to check his car doors. He saw three bugs, Eileen, Roger and Tyler having sex in his front yard. Tyler ate Duane Coventry. Meanwhile, Ingrid noticed Hungry Jack near Robby’s car. Hungry Jack tried to bite through the windshield, then raised his arms, cracking the glass when he pounded it. At that moment, Robby came out of his apartment building. Austin tried to warn him.

In the section “Clickety, Clickety” Austin continued to try to warn Robby even though it might mean he would get eaten himself. When Hungry Jack saw Robby, he jumped from the car, backed up, and then ran. They boys later learned that Robby was God to the Unstoppable Soldiers.



In the section “On the Roof Again” Austin and Robby hurry toward Grasshopper Jungle believing they can still stop the end of the world. On the ride there Robby got a message from Shann saying she hated him. Austin sent a return message asking if they could talk. Shann replied she hated them both. As Austin and Robby climbed to the roof to get the remaining reels of film, Johnny McKeon was in the store below them, waiting for the police to respond to his alarm. Robby asked Austin what he was going to do about Shann. Austin didn’t know. He said he thought he should leave both of them alone until he came to a decision in order to keep from hurting both of them. They decided to hurry and leave when they saw red police lights coming their direction.

Analysis

The novel begins to reach a climax as Part 4 opens. Robby and Austin have decided to try to save the world from the infestation of Unstoppable Soldiers but they must first watch the last two reels of the Eden Orientation Series to find out how to stop the soldiers. More and more people are seeing the huge bugs and panicking.

Austin and Robby had to deal with a few stumbling blocks on their way to get the remainder of the film. First, Shann finally confronted Austin about his feelings for Robby. She had noticed Robby appeared to be in love with Austin and wondered if Austin realized the same thing. She was disgusted when she learned the truth. Now, along with worrying about his brother, and worrying about the state of the world, Austin also worried about his relationship with his girlfriend.

Notice Austin at first wanted to be mean to Robby because Shann was angry with him. He left the front door to his house open as a sign they weren’t hiding anything. He knew Robby knew what the open front door meant and that he would take it as a sign of passive anger. Although Austin had mixed feelings about his love for Robby notice that when Austin believed Robby was about to be eaten by the bug, Austin knew he had to do something to help his friend even if it meant putting himself in danger.

Significant in this section is Robby and Austin’s trip back to the surface of Earth. Had all of the Eden films been in the Eden movie theater, they probably wouldn’t have come back to the surface until they’d finished watching the entire series. They would not have had the opportunity to see for themselves what was happening in the world above them. Note that at this point, they still only knew for sure that Hungry Jack had hatched out. Though they assumed Grant Wallace and his friends were also infected, they didn’t know that for sure.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Hungry Jack did not eat Robby?



Discussion Question 2

Did Shann react to Austin's admission that he had kissed Robby as you thought she would? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss humor and word play as it is used in the novel.

Vocabulary

devout, adversely, menacing, delusion, vindication



Part 4: The End of the World; Denny Drayton Has a Gun, Motherfucker – Satan and the Preacher

Summary

In the section “Denny Drayton Has a Gun, Motherfucker” Denny Drayton, the trooper who responded to Johnny McKeon’s alarm, was bored and had to use the bathroom. He pulled up in front of Johnny’s store just as the bug that had formerly been Tyler walked out of The Pancake House. Pastor Roland Duff was eating at Stan’s Pizza and texting with a new friend from the Tally-Ho! when he saw the commotion. Denny aimed his light at Tyler, who decided to eat Denny. Meanwhile in Guatemala, Robert Bress, Sr. thought about his son for the first time in years as ash began to fall on his house. In Germany, Eric looked at the tubes and machines around him and wondered if any of it could be used in committing suicide. On the way back to Eden, Austin thought about the vice president, who had named his balls, getting a blow job. He asked Robby if he’d named his testicles. Meanwhile, Denny began shooting at Tyler. Unfortunately, the Unstoppable Soldiers’ exoskeleton was bullet resistant. When Denny stopped to reload, Tyler grabbed him up and bit off his head. Instead of trying to fight the monster, Johnny got in his truck and drove away. Stan and the pastor, however, stepped out to see what was happening.

In the section “Exile In Eden” Austin called and begged Shann to come to Eden with them before he and Robby went back down to watch the remainder of the film. In the section “A Chance Meeting Under a Portrait of a Presbyterian, or, Calvin Coolidge’s Canoe” Austin’s father was the only one of Felek and Ksenia’s children who stayed in Ealing. He’d gotten his first teaching job at Herbert Hoover High School. A boy in his World History class had begged his teacher to meet his sister, Connie, now Austin’s mother. The two met during a parent teacher conference during which Connie attended instead of her brother’s parents. Austin’s father stopped smoking and became Lutheran for her. They had two sons, Eric and Austin.

In the section “A Most Soothing Showerhead” Austin and Robby learned from the film that the McKeon scientists worked hard to make Unstoppable Soldiers but didn’t bother to try to come up with a way to stop these creatures. They learn the hands, penis and two-headed boy in Johnny’s office were all created using Dr. Grady McKeon’s tissue samples. Meanwhile, Dr. Grady McKeon had been collecting sperm samples from rich and powerful men. These samples were stored in a freezer in the brain room as a precaution in case only women were able to escape to Eden. In 1975, however, Dr. Grady McKeon threw away all of the sperm with the exception of his own.

In the section “Infinita Milites! Infinita Milites!” there were five people initially infected by the plague strain 412E in 1968. No one ever knew about these, as the bugs never got



outside McKeon Industries. The scientists waited to see if the bugs would go away on their own, which they did not do. Meanwhile, the female bugs began laying massive egg masses. Robby remarked the egg masses looked like the stuff inside Johnny's globe. In an addition that appeared to have been filmed several years later, Dr. Grady McKeon announced it had been learned that the bugs were afraid of him. His scientists began experimenting again.

In the section "Robby The Theologian" it turned out the Unstoppable Soldiers could be killed easily with the blood of the host. In 1968 it was Dr. Grady McKeon's blood that did the trick. In Austin's time it was Robby's blood that was needed. Recorded on the rest of the film was footage of what happened once the egg masses began to hatch. The lab was full of full-grown Unstoppable Soldiers within days. Even though Austin and Robby didn't know it, there was even more on the film that was even worse than what they'd already seen.

In the section "Satan and the Pastor" Stan and Pastor Roland Duff walked out to see what had happened across the street from them. As they walked toward the mess, the bug that was Travis Pope climbed onto the top of Denny's patrol car. He grabbed and ate both men. Meanwhile, Ollie Jungfrau packed his minivan with the intent of getting out of Ealing. He saw Louis and the eighth grade English teacher running along the side of the street and offered them a ride.

Analysis

Notice that along with his fascination with the sexual lives of the people included in his story, Austin also seems obsessed with their bathroom habits. In this section, for instance, he mentions the fact that Denny Drayton had to poop as he responded to Johnny McKeon's request for assistance. He also mentions that the state trooper enjoyed the smell of his own farts.

The trooper is presented as not being terribly intelligent as well as being reckless and not necessarily careful about following the laws. For instance, he chewed tobacco while on patrol even though he wasn't supposed to. He had a line of text and an image tattooed on him that indicated he isn't overly considerate of others and he had an attitude of superiority. Because of his cocky attitude, the reader doesn't feel terribly sorry for Denny when he gets eaten. Again the author puts his dry sense of humor into play when he describes the way that Denny used his "keen sense of lowan normalcy" to determine something wasn't right at the Ealing Mall as it would have been quite obvious even to untrained law enforcement that something had gone terribly wrong there.

Information in the section develops the theme of the unusual practices taking place at McKeon Industries. Austin has already noted in the novel that when scientists conducted experiments, they generally had some idea about the outcome they were hoping to achieve and had some general idea about how to achieve this outcome. It appears the McKeon scientists really didn't have any idea what they hoped would happen when they began their experiments. Austin reports that as far as he could tell,



the men would just select random items to use in their experiments in which they hoped to create something unstoppable. He points out that two of the most common choices for their experimentation were blood and semen.

Also in this section, Austin fills out the description of the people who worked with Dr. Grady McKeon. He says the men were crazy and drunk on power. Austin also indicates that Dr. Grady McKeon would have done anything to be the first person to create an Unstoppable Force. This includes the death of coworkers, etc. Notice that all of the experiments and all of the bugs were kept inside the McKeon factory so no one ever knew what was happening. McKeon himself apparently had some sort of God complex as he destroyed all of the sperm he had collected and stored in the vault in Eden with the exception of his own. This sperm was intended to help propagate the new species of humans. Instead of providing those who might be trapped in Eden with a variety of genetic materials from which to choose, McKeon limited their sperm choices to his own.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the emphasis on bodily functions in the novel. Austin has a tendency to focus on aspects of a person like if they were constipated, if they had to use the bathroom, if they'd named their testicles, etc. What purpose do you think these bits of information serve?

Discussion Question 2

It was learned that many people were killed during the experiments at McKeon Industries. How do you think their deaths were explained at the time they happened?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Denny Denton's character. Why was he included in the novel?

Vocabulary

entrepreneurism, normalcy, immoral, compromising, wracked, subsidized, askance, conjugate, cryogenic, postulated, depletion, hypothetical, legible, ranting, catastrophic, surveillance, formidable, rookeries, prominent, catalysts, theologian, surname, melodious, molted, gargoyle



Part 4: The End of the World; Serial Killer USA – Rules are Rules, But the Brain Room is Not Particularly Brainy

Summary

In the section “Serial Killer USA” Austin suggested that he and Robby kill the Unstoppable Soldiers by shooting them with paintballs filled with Robby’s blood. As they continued to watch the Eden film, the two boys realized the string of serial murders reported in Ealing was actually the result of McKeon Industries trying to clean up its mess from experimentations carried out on prison inmates. It was discovered the only way to prevent hatching of those exposed to the plague was by removing the victims’ heads. The final scenes of the film include footage of the company’s spring picnic. As the film ended, Robby and Austin heard the greeting message as someone opened the hatch to Eden.

In the section “Looking for Wiggles” it was now a week into the end of the world. Eileen Pope’s bug had taken over Duane Coventry’s house as the place to lay her eggs. She filled the entire house. Roger Baird and Tyler Jacobson’s bugs got into a fight when Tyler, who was high on meth, tried to have sex with Roger. Tyler bit Roger’s head off then continued to try to have sex with the corpse.

Meanwhile, Connie Brees thought about Ah Wong Sing as she worked. She wondered if her son was gay and if Austin was his boyfriend. She didn’t care if he was, she wanted her son to be happy and not have to take drugs like she did.

At the same time, the bug that was Tyler Pope made his way to the house where Eileen had laid her eggs. He stood in the middle of Kelsey Creek Bridge as Ollie Jungfrau drove across from the other side. Pretending like he was in a video game, Ollie crashed his van into Tyler. Edith Mitchell was disgusted by Ollie’s behavior. She’d been out looking for her cat, Wiggles, and had returned home to find a bug eating her husband. After Ollie’s van was demolished by its impact with Tyler, Tyler began eating Ollie. Ah Wong Sing tried to find a way to escape but was not successful.

In the next section “Concerning the Bison, and Free Will” Austin began to wonder if history was responsible for killing free will. He began to feel that by writing about his life and his family he had doomed them to do the same things over and over again. Meanwhile, he felt trapped and confused about his love for both Robby and Shann.

In the section “Population Explosion” Robby and Austin learned it was Shann, her mother and her stepfather who had joined them in Eden. Austin told Johnny it was time for him to show them what had been happening.



In the section “Everything a Guy Could Need, and the Two Best Rock Albums Ever Made” Robby and Austin learned from Johnny there was more than just one bug that had hatched out in Ealing. As the five talked, they drank in Eden’s bar. Austin and Robby show Wendy and Johnny a portion of the Eden introductory film in the section “The Blood of God.” Austin told Johnny he’d come up with a plan to try to save the Earth. Robby agreed to have his blood drawn if he could have more scotch. Wendy, who was a registered nurse, drew blood from Robby in Eden’s medical clinic. Shann went into the hallway before her mother drew Austin’s blood. Robby indicated to Austin he wanted him to follow her.

In the section “Wanda Mae’s Pink Bowling Ball” Austin walked up behind Shann and asked her not to hate Robby or him. He told her he didn’t think he was gay and that he loved her. They moved together into the bowling alley where they threw off their clothes and had sex. Meanwhile, Ah Wong Sing climbed out of Ollie’s minivan through the front window. Edith Mitchell refused to leave. Back in Eden, after Austin and Shann finished having sex, Austin was more confused than ever and felt guilty because of the way he was treating Shann and Robby. Austin felt Robby knew what had happened and was angry with him. Robby gave Austin’s Saint Kazimierz medal back to him.

In the section “Rules and Rules but the Brain Room in Not particularly Brainy,” Johnny told Austin and Robby they should wait until daylight to go for their paintball guns. Wendy began trying to make rules for behavior in Eden. The group was headed toward the dormitories when they discovered the Brain Room. Robby guessed this was the room in which Dr. Grady McKeon had stored all of his sperm. Austin notes they later learned he was right.

Analysis

Rounding out the theme of McKeon Industries, Austin and Robby learn that it was Dr. Grady McKeon’s company that was responsible for the string of serial killings in 1968. The headless corpses found in the fields around Ealing were the bodies of prisoners who had volunteered to participate in McKeon’s experiments. The corpses were decapitated because it was discovered it was only by cutting off the head that a person exposed to the plague could be kept from hatching into an Unstoppable Soldier.

Also significant in this section is Austin's act of finally having sex with Shann. He has been concerned about his sexuality as he feels sexually attracted to both his best male friend, Robby, and his girlfriend, Shann. Austin has been experimenting sexually with Robby and has been suggesting to Shann he’d like to have sex with her. Although Austin might have been taking advantage of an opportunity to see what sex was like with a female, it seems more likely that Austin and Shann just get carried away with their emotions in the face of their stress.

Notice the use of the Saint Kazimierz medal during this section of the novel. Austin seemed truly concerned for his friend when he was getting ready to give blood to fight the Unstoppable Soldiers. He gave Robby the medal to wear to give him strength when



his blood was taken. When Robby realized that Austin and Shann had had sex, Robby gave Austin the medal back. His attitude toward Austin was cool. This was the first time that it had appeared that Robby had really been offended by something that Austin and Shann have done together.

Interesting in this section in relation to the theme of history is Austin's comment about the bison. He wonders if he had paid too much attention to the people he dealt with and too little attention to the bison. He's noticed that people have the habit of doing the same things over and over even though he believes the point of writing down one's history is to keep from doing these things over and over again. He suddenly wonders if by writing down history, just as cavemen drew the bison on the wall, he was dooming the people about which he wrote to continue to do the things he wrote about.

Some things to notice in this section include the boys' comments to one another that they feel dumber after having watched the Eden films. Notice also the male on male copulation between the bugs after Eileen began laying her eggs. Notice the simile used when Ollie tried to smash one of the bus with his minivan. It involves a reference to agriculture by comparing the minivan hitting the bug to "an Ozark watermelon throwing itself onto the cutting edge of a samurai sword (p. 304.)"

Notice also in this section the multiple references to homosexuality. Austin writes that it is ironic that in the case of the Unstoppable Soldiers, the hero in the story will be a homosexual. He also notes the only reason that homosexuality is such a taboo is because someone once made a rule that boys were not allowed to love one another.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss rulemaking as it is presented in the novel.

Discussion Question 2

Why is it significant that the person who was able to save the world from the Unstoppable Soldiers was homosexual?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the sexual encounter between Austin and Shann. Why was Robbie so unhappy with Austin after he had sex with Shann?

Vocabulary

horde, incarcerated, placid, exhortations, translucent, copulate, undeterred, tributary, wayward, interminable, nonchalantly, coriander, simultaneously, automated, embossed, precise



Part 4: The End of the World; Never Look for Ice Cream in a Sperm Freezer – There are No Cup-O-Noodles in Eden

Summary

In the section “Never Look for Ice Cream in a Sperm Freezer” the group learned that Dr. Grady McKeon had given his testicle dissolving corn to television star James Arness as well as the pope. The Great Seal of McKeon Industries served as the door to the sperm vault. The group also found the door to Dr. Grady’s McKeon’s brain room.

In the section “A Real Concrete Iowa Thinker” there were two heads looking at them from McKeon’s desk when they opened the door to his office. They were actually grimacing lemur masks. They found things in McKeon’s office that were similar to those that were in Johnny’s office. There were also five old-fashioned television sets in the office but they didn’t bring in any channels. Austin also located the doctor’s logbook, which he believed was the real prize. McKeon believed he would be the king of a new universe. Austin believed it was humorous because the man’s sperm was useless. They learn through the logbook that the lemur masks were made to detect people who were infected by the plague.

In the section “Nighttime in Eden,” Austin noticed Shann was nervous and shy when he said goodnight to her. He realized they shouldn’t have had sex. He took a shower before writing until he went to sleep. He found a brochure with a picture of Dr. Grady McKeon’s secretary on it and realized she was the model for the McKeon Industry Seal. McKeon had sealed up the silo after the secretary, Wanda Mae Rutkowski ran away with Jan Wojner, the grandson of Bruno Wojner. After that, Dr. Grady McKeon had gotten crazier and crazier, and had forgotten all about the Eden Project. He’d finally moved to Costa Rica, making only one trip back to Ealing to attend a stockholder’s meeting. His plane had crashed during that trip.

In the section “The Finale of Seem,” Austin writes that in 1937, after losing his wife a year before, Krzys had moved back to Poland. He was killed there two years later marching with a group of Polish refugees. Austin hoped to find the place where he was killed and put flowers there.

Austin told Robby he’d decided to name his testicles after the Wright Brothers in the section “The Sunlight Bores the Daylights out of Me.” He and Robby were headed to his house to get the paintball guns. Before he’d left, Austin asked Shann about the night before. She told him the sex hurt, and that he didn’t use a condom. Austin asked Robby what he should do but Robby turned the question around on him, telling him that he didn’t know what to do, much less tell anyone else what they should do. As they drove, Austin and Robby noticed that homes and buildings were on fire in Ealing. Robby told



Austin people like him were called selfish as he didn't really care about Robby or Shann. As they turned to cross Kelsey Creek Bridge, Robby cursed in surprise.

In the section "The Right Kind of Cigarettes to Smoke Before You Kill Something" the two saw Ollie's ruined minivan. They both put on their lemur masks to see if there were any infected people around. Edith Mitchell watched them from the backseat of the van. Seeing Robby and Austin in their jumpsuits and lemur masks pushed her past the brink of sanity. When Robby and Austin drove away, Edith jumped from the bridge. As they continued to drive, Austin and Robby saw a news van on its side with a bloody mess inside. Robby made a plan for them to get to Austin's house and get their guns loaded quickly, then go to his apartment to get his mom.

In the section "There are No Cup-O-Noodles in Eden" Austin and Robby prepared the paintball pellets at Austin's house. He grabbed some underwear and several packages of Cup-O-Noodles before leaving. Before he left, the phone rang, it was Austin's father. He wanted to know what was happening there. At that moment, the electricity went out.

Analysis

Disorder and lawlessness had taken over the town of Ealing. When Robby and Austin left Eden to load their paintball pellets with Robby's blood, they saw homes on fire and a destroyed news van. Austin's father, who was still with Eric, called Austin wanting to know what was happening in Ealing as he was seeing news reports.

Robby seems in this section to be getting frustrated with Austin continuously asking him what he should do. Robby basically told Austin he needed to figure it out for himself. Robby told Austin he was being selfish and didn't really care about either Shann or Robby. It didn't necessarily seem that Austin was uncaring, he'd voiced his concern that he needed to leave both Shann and Robby alone because he was afraid he was hurting them. It seems more that he was trying not to hurt either of his friends while trying to determine which way he should go in regard to his sexual orientation. Notice in this section that Austin called himself a bisexual, meaning that he realized that he might not be strictly homosexual or heterosexual.

Notice that in this section Dr. Grady McKeon went completely crazy after his receptionist, Wanda Mae Rutkowski left him for another man. Ironically, this man was the grandson of Bruno Wojner, the man who was the uncle of the man with whom Austin's great grandfather had a homosexual affair. It is also noted that as Dr. Grady McKeon had grown more crazy, and finally moved away from Ealing, he forgot about The Eden Project. Had Johnny McKeon's new wife not insisted her family move into the McKeon mention, the teens would never have stumbled onto Eden.

Notice in this section of the novel how much Austin admired Robby for his love of his mother. Even though Robby's mother used drugs and didn't keep really good tabs on him, Robby loved her enough to want to save her. He seemed to have a better grasp on



the seriousness of their situation than did Austin. Austin had not even thought about his own parents.

While they were investigating Dr. Grady McKeon's brain room, Robby and Austin learn the significance of the lemur mask that they found on top of the roof of the Ealing Mall. This mask allowed the wearer to identify the people who were infected with the plague but hadn't hatched out yet.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Robby was correct in accusing Austin of being selfish? Do you think Austin really loved either of his friends?

Discussion Question 2

Since he knew what the plague would do to people, why do you think Dr. Grady McKeon kept the mold? Why didn't he destroy it?

Discussion Question 3

What differences do Robby and Austin notice in the town when they went to get their paintball guns?

Vocabulary

cataclysm, sublime, annihilation, oblong, deranged, primitive, calibrated, monochromatic, undiluted, frenetic, converted, globular, stenographic, subterranean, refugees, appraisal, bisexual, deployed, monolith, brutal



Part 4: The End of the World; Rat Boys from Mars, And an Unfortunate Incident Involving an Inflatable Whale – Great Big Jar

Summary

In the section “Rat Boys from Mars, and an Unfortunate Incident Involving an Inflatable Whale” Robby and Austin are fired at with real guns by their next-door neighbor as they leave Austin’s house carrying their paintball guns. Austin writes about how the next-door neighbor’s son has only one testicle because one of them was damaged when it got stuck in an inflatable whale during the boy’s ninth birthday party. When the Elgins realized it was Austin and Robby, they went back to packing their camper in their effort to escape from Ealing.

In the section “The Battle of Del Vista Arms” Austin thought about the way life had been normal just one week prior. After they had gotten beat up by Grant Wallace and his friends, everything had gone downhill. When they pulled up at Robby’s apartment complex, Ah Wong Sing was hiding in the dumpster area. He’d run from Ollie’s minivan hoping to find safety at Connie’s apartment but instead had encountered Hungry Jack. He’d hidden from Hungry Jack in the dumpster area. Hungry Jack caught sight of Austin and grabbed him by the head. Just as he was about to bite down, Robby shot Hungry Jack with the paintball gun. They watched as the huge bug fell apart.

In the section “The End of the World” Robby and Austin don’t know that there are only three Unstoppable Soldiers left on the planet. They are joined by Ah Wong Sing as they go to look for Robby’s mother. At the same time Shann was laying on her bed crying. She and her father had seen the smoke rising from Ealing. Shann didn’t know it, but she was already pregnant. Robby Brees’ father’s family began walking away from their home when the volcano began to erupt in Guatemala. The vice president was visiting Eric in the hospital. Three National Guard helicopters were also flying over Robby’s apartment building. Robby knocked on his apartment door, waking his mother.

In the section “Pictures of Robby and Shann” Austin had drawn a picture of Robby on Monday night wearing nothing but underwear sitting on the floor beside half a bottle of wine. He’d also drawn a picture of Shann sitting on the staircase that led nowhere in her new bedroom. Austin realized he loved both his friends in the same way. He was afraid he was wrecking their lives.

In the section “The Intergalactic Bug Cops” Austin fingered his Saint Kazimierz medal and thought of the chapel they’d found in Eden. He decided as he rode with Robby away from Del Vista Arms apartments that he was going to convert to Catholicism. He



believed he had been saved by the saint. Two National Guard soldiers stopped Robby's car. One of them was glowing red.

In the section "Enola Gay and Beau Barton's Boner" Connie told the guardsmen she was taking her husband and sons to Waterloo. The guardsmen's names are Beau Barton and Florencio Villegas. Florencio had been infected by the 412E plague. Austin and Robby later tried to figure out how he might have been infected. Austin noticed that as Beau Barton talked to Connie, he got a very large erection. When he saw Austin looking at it, he got very angry.

In the section "The Battle of Kelsey Creek Bridge" Beau Barton and Florencio Villegas had been posted at the Kelsey Creek Bridge to evacuate people out of Ealing. Unfortunately, as the guardsmen tried to lead Robby and his Explorer across the bridge, the bugs that had been Tyler and Travis showed up. They had molted and were now eight feet tall. The guardsmen got out their armored vehicle and shot at the bugs, but the bullets had no effect on them. Tyler grabbed Florencio and ate him. He even tried to eat the gun but spat it back out. Beau Barton continued firing until Travis noticed him. Travis sprang on Beau as Austin got out of Robby's vehicle and ran toward him. He shot the creature with his paintball gun while Robby shot the other one. Meanwhile, the eggs laid by the bug that was Eileen Pope were hatching.

In the section "Great Big Jar" Austin, Robby and the others transferred their belongings to the National Guard vehicle. As they drove, they believed they had hit a small child. When Austin got out to look, however, it was a small Unstoppable Soldier. Austin ran for the armored vehicle and told Robby to move. They began to see hundreds of tiny Unstoppable Soldiers.

Analysis

The theme of religion and Saint Kazimierz continue to be important in this section of the novel. Just as the Biblical Garden of Eden had its Adam and Eve, Austin and Shann were the Adam and Eve of the new Eden. Just like in the original Eden, the new Eden's Adam did not use a condom. Austin continued to question God and his role in people's lives as he watched how Robby's mother reacted when she saw the National Guardsmen eaten by the bugs. Austin believed that God was responsible for not stopping what was happening in the world. He doesn't understand Connie's decision to call out to God for help when he feels the situation in which they found themselves was God's fault. Instead of thanking God, Austin gave Saint Kazimierz the credit for having saved him from being shot by his neighbors.

In this section life in Ealing had become worse as the beginning of the end of the world was now a week old. The residents of Ealing were trying to run from the city or were trying to fight the creatures by burning down their own homes and were generally in a state of panic. The National Guard had been called in to help evacuate the city and fight against the bugs. Even these soldiers had little effect on the bugs as the only way to kill them was with Robby's blood.



In the theme of history Austin discusses the way that historians messed up the factual basis of history when they tried to make conjectures. He and Robby tried to figure out how the one National Guardsman was infected with the plague. They made guesses about how the man might have gotten the plague but can't come to any solid decision about how he might have gotten sick. Austin chooses not to include any of the suggestions that he and Robby came up with in their attempt to decide how the man got sick as he thinks it will mess up his truthful, factual account.

Notice in this section that it is indicated that the vice president, who had been described in the past as liking his testicles, didn't know what to say to Eric when he visited him in the hospital.

As Austin watched the Unstoppable Soldiers walk through the shower of bullets, notice how the action was described with a simile that was unrelated to what was actually happening. While the attempted death of the soldier was scary and violent, the author uses images of a cat walking through darkness and beauty queens walking through glitter to describe the incident.

Discussion Question 1

Why is it significant that the vice president was uncomfortable when he went to visit Eric? Why does the location of Eric's injury make any difference in the way that the vice president treats him?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the image that Austin gave to describe the end of the world.

Discussion Question 3

In what ways are Shann and Austin like the Biblical Adam and Eve? How has the book turned out to be like the movie *Eden Five Needs You*?

Vocabulary

rampage, detached, epiphany, intergalactic, carnage, stimulated, cowered, coherent, noxious, defiant, aesthetic, proclaim, concurred, detainers, conjectured, conspicuously, idiomatic, tarmac, craftily



Epilogue: Lucky, A Cigarette Run, and The Bison

Summary

In the Epilogue nearly five years have passed since the end of the world. The day is Robby's 21st birthday. He and Austin are going out for a cigarette run. Arek Andrej Szczerba, whom his father calls "Lucky," the son of Austin and Shann is four years old. Austin is still confused about his torn emotions between Robby and Shann. He chooses to live by himself and stop asking himself what he is going to do. During the winter, when the Unstoppable Soldiers are apparently hibernating, Robby and Austin go out on what they call cigarette runs. So far, they have found no other humans on the Earth. They bring gifts for those in Eden when they return including new clothes, food, books and toys. Books are especially important since computers and televisions no longer work.

Johnny believes there is still life somewhere else in the world. He tries to get reception on the bank of televisions but has no luck. Austin believes Johnny is losing his mind. He doesn't know what has happened to his parents or Eric. He imagines they are well and able to speak German, or Polish, fluently. As Robby and Austin prepare to leave, they notice huge creatures outside. They are seeing a herd of North American bison.

Analysis

Significant in this section is Austin's decision about what to do about his sexuality. He's decided not to make a decision. Although Robby has asked Austin to move in with him in Eden, Austin prefers to live by himself. He knew that neither Shann nor Robby liked his decision but Austin is happy with the life he has chosen for himself.

Significant also in this section is the herd of bison that Robby, Austin and Austin's son see. These bison are symbols of the beginning of the world and are among some of the earliest recorded history. Now that the new world is in its opening stages, the bison appear again. It is a sign that history is repeating itself with connections begin made to the beginning of time.

Notice the only person in Eden who seems to be having trouble with the transition between life on Earth and life in Eden is Johnny. Although he'd been laid back and easy going while on Earth, he appears to be losing his mind as he tries to deal with restricted human interaction in Eden. Austin indicates that he spends his days searching for reception on the television sets in Dr. Grady McKeon's office.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Austin call his son Lucky?

Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of the bison at the end of the novel?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think that Austin has stopped asking himself what he's going to do with his relationship with both Shann and Robby?

Vocabulary

totem, hibernate, scavenged, feign, diaspora



Characters

Austin Szerba

Austin Szerba was the main character, narrator and writer of this history of the end of the world. At the time the novel begins, he was a tenth grader at Curtis Crane Lutheran Academy. His best friend, Robby Brees, was homosexual. Austin was confused about his sexual orientation as he was attracted sexually to both his girlfriend, Shann Collins, and to Robby. Though he didn't dwell on it as much, Austin was also confused about his religious beliefs. His father changed to Lutheranism when he married Austin's mother. Before that, however, all of Austin's ancestors had been Catholic. Austin had begun wearing and praying to a Saint Kazimierz medal he'd been given by his boss even though he wasn't supposed to believe in saints because he was a Lutheran. At the end of the novel Austin decided to change back to Catholicism and also change his name back to the original Polish spelling. Austin, however, never came to any definitive decision about his sexual orientation.

Austin describes himself as a historian and feels his purpose in life is to record his history. It turns out that his history includes the end of the world. Austin's story began when he and his best friend Robby were beat up by boys from the other high school in the town because it was believed Robby and Austin were both gay. The other boys wound up throwing Austin and Robby's shoes and skateboards on top of the roof of the mall. When Austin and Robby went to the roof of the mall to retrieve their things, Austin's curiosity got the best of him. He and Robby decided to break into the second hand store where Austin worked part time. Austin wanted to see what was in his boss' office. In the office, he saw strange specimens like a two-headed boy and a globe full of a strange substance that moved, writhed and glowed blue. While Austin and Robby were in the office, the boys who had beat them up earlier also broke into the store. They didn't see Austin and Robby but they did steal the globe with the glowing blue substance. On their way out of the store, Austin and Robby watched as the boys dropped the globe onto the pavement where Robby had bled just a few hours before during the fight. This set into motion a series of events that lead to the end of the world where huge creatures that look like praying mantises take over.

Austin, along with Robby, tried to save the world using information they'd gleaned from an introductory movie they found in an underground shelter built by Dr. Grady McKeon, the same man whose company had accidentally created the huge bugs. Austin and Robby were not able to save the world as millions of young bugs had hatched out, far too many for them to kill. Austin, however, followed Dr. Grady McKeon's instructions to breed as he had sex with Shann in Eden, the name of the shelter built by McKeon to which Austin, Robby and his mother, and Shann and her parents fled when the bugs began multiplying. Shann gave birth to a son, named Arek Andrzej Szszerba, whom Austin called Lucky.



Dr. Grady McKeon

Dr. Grady McKeon was the owner and founder of McKeon Industries. The doctor was killed when his private jet crashed in the Gulf of Mexico because of the volcanic ash from Mount Huacamochtli. Dr. Grady McKeon was the much older brother of Johnny McKeon. It was suggested in the novel that the man who created the Eden Project was psychotic. He spent much of his life trying to create a species of Unstoppable Soldiers for the department of defense. His soldiers killed numerous workers in his plant while the project was in the development stages. He was even allowed to experiment on prisoners who volunteered for the project. While working with these inmates, it was learned that the only way to keep humans infected by the 412E plague from hatching was by cutting off their heads. All the inmates killed in this manner were disposed of in fields in the area, making many people think Ealing was inhabited by a serial killer. It turned out that McKeon was the serial killer. McKeon had set up Eden as a place where people could take cover from the Unstoppable Soldiers if there was even another outbreak of the plague. He'd stocked a vault with sperm from influential people to help propagate future species but as he became more deranged, he discarded all of the semen except his own, a sign that he wanted to be the father of this new generation.

Robby Brees

Robby Brees was Austin's best friend. He was also a tenth grader at Curtis Crane Lutheran Academy. Robby was homosexual. He was in love with Austin. Even though Robby was in love with Austin, he was also friends with Shann, Austin's girlfriend. He was the one who arranged for the two to meet when they were in the seventh grade.

Robby fills an important role in the novel, as it was his blood that served as the host for the plague strain 412-E. Robby had been hit in the nose and given a nosebleed by Grant Wallace and his friends when they beat up Robby and Austin in the alleyway behind Ealing Mall. Robby had attempted to write the words "GRANT WALLACE MURDERED ME" in his blood on the pavement in the alley. When Tyler dropped the globe containing the plague a few hours later, he dropped it onto Robby's bloody message. Robby's blood served as host for the plague, allowing it to infect Grant and his friends, along with three other people. After Robby and Austin watched all five reels of film from Dr. Grant McKeon's introductory series, they learned that Robby's blood could be used to kill the bugs.

Shann Collins

Shann Collins was Austin's girlfriend. She was the stepdaughter of Johnny McKeon, the younger brother of Dr. Grady McKeon. In the course of time the novel covers, Shann and her family moved into the mansion that formerly belonged to Dr. Grady McKeon. The three teens learned about the underground shelter Dr. Grady McKeon had prepared when Shann told Robby and Austin she could hear a strange typing sound in her wall every six hours. Robby and Austin found a teletype machine in her wall which



was typing out a message instructing them to go to the silo as the plague strain 412-E had been detected. Shann took it upon herself to find an old picture of the house in which she now lived so she could locate the silo. During a highly emotional time when Shann's mother was drawing blood from Robby so Robby and Austin could try to stop the takeover of the world, Shann allowed Austin to have sex with her. The first baby born in Eden was the product of this first sexual encounter for both of them.

Eric Szerba

Eric Szerba was Austin's older brother. Eric signed up with the Marine Corps when Austin was in the seventh grade. During the time period in which the novel covers, Eric had been stationed in Afghanistan. He was hit by shrapnel from a bomb that killed the two soldiers he was with. Eric's right leg was blown off from the knee down and both his testicles were blown off. Austin's parents had gone to Germany to visit Eric in the hospital at the time that the bugs were taking over the town of Ealing. Because his parents were out of the country at the time of the infestation, Austin was never sure what happened to his parents or Eric.

Charles "Hungry Jack" R. Hoofard

Charles "Hungry Jack" R. Hoofard was a homeless man who had a habit of eating out the dumpster behind the Ealing Mall. He was infected by the plague when he ate a piece of pizza from the dumpster. Hungry Jack hatched out in front of Austin and Robby after they saw him get hit by a Dodge truck and thrown into a cornfield. Before he became homeless, Hungry Jack had served in the United States Army in Vietnam. He'd been part of the extermination of an entire village of women, children and elderly people during his time in the Army.

Ollie Jungfrau

Ollie Jungfrau was the clerk who worked at Johnny McKeon's Topsy Cricket Liquor Store. Ollie's favorite pastime was playing video games. Ollie saw one of the Unstoppable Soldiers for the first time when he looked out his window and saw the confrontation between Robby and Hungry Jack. Ollie packed his mini van and tried to run away from Ealing but he made it as far as the Kelesy Creek Bridge where he encountered the bug that had hatched out from Travis Pope. Ollie tried to ram the creature with his van but instead wrecked his van and got eaten by Travis.

Johnny McKeon

Johnny McKeon was the younger brother of Dr. Grady McKeon. He was the owner of the secondhand store From Attic to Seller and also the Topsy Cricket Liquor Store. He was Austin's boss at the store and also the stepfather of Shann Collins, Austin's girlfriend. Johnny gave Austin a Saint Kazimierz medal he found in a jewelry box



brought to the consignment store. Johnny was one of the people who took refuge in Eden after the Unstoppable Soldiers took over Earth. Austin believed Johnny had begun to lose his mind in Eden as he continuously searched the televisions for a broadcast from the outside.

Grant Wallace and the Hoover Boys

Gant Wallace and the Hoover Boys included Tyler Jacobson, Devin Stoddard and Roger Baird. These boys were the ones who beat up Robby and Austin because they believed the two boys were both homosexual. Later that same day, these same boys stole the globe of the contained plague from Johnny's office. The plague was set free when Tyler dropped it as they left the mall. All four of the boys were infected with the plague and hatched out a few days later.

Denny Drayton

Denny Drayton was the Iowa State Trooper who responded to Johnny McKeon's alarm at From Attic to Seller. Drayton was described as having translucent white skin and shaving his entire body every day. He had a tattoo stating "Denny Drayton has a gun motherfucker" above his navel and a confederate flag above his scrotum. When he saw a gigantic bug, he tried to kill it with his service weapon but the bullets had no effect on the creature. Denny was eaten by the bug that was once Travis Pope.

Louis aka Ah Wong Sing

Louis was the name of the cook who worked at The Pancake House. He didn't really become a major part of the story until he had an affair with Connie Brees, Austin's mother. When Robby and Austin returned to his apartment to get his mother to take her to the safety of Eden. Louis went along with them. Connie and Louis produced the second baby born in Eden.

Pastor Roland Duff

Pastor Roland Duff was the headmaster at Curtis Crane Lutheran Academy. He lectured Austin about the dangers of masturbation after Austin wrote a report on a book that mentioned masturbation. His lecture lost some of its power when Austin and Robby saw the man going into the Tally-Ho! a gay bar. It appeared that the pastor had some vices of which the church would probably not approve.

Felek Szczerba

Felek Szczerba, also called Feliz Szerba, was Austin's grandfather. During Dr. Grady McKeon's introductory films for the Eden Project, Austin learned that his grandfather did



not die in a motorcycle accident as he had thought. Felek Szczerba was actually the first person infected with the 412E plague and hatched into an Unstoppable Soldier.

Eileen Pope

Eileen Pope was Travis Pope's wife. She was among the first people to be infected by the 412E plague when she and her husband cleaned up the broken glass from the globe in the alleyway behind Johnny's store. Eileen became the mother of the new generation of Unstoppable Soldiers as she was the only female bug among the first seven victims.

Duane Coventry

Duane Coventry was the high school chemistry teacher who enjoyed cooking and getting high on methamphetamine. He was high on meth the night that he saw the bugs that were Roger Baird, Eileen Pope and Tyler Jacobson having sex in his yard. He was eaten by the bug that hatched from Tyler Jacobson.

Travis Pope

Travis Pope was among the first victims of the 412E plague. He and his wife, Eileen, were infected when they cleaned the broken glass from the globe out of the alleyway behind the mall.

Wendy McKeon

Wendy McKeon was the wife of Johnny McKeon and mother of Shann Collins. She, along with the rest of her family, took refuge in Eden after the Unstoppable Soldiers took over Earth.

Symbols and Symbolism

The Bison

The bison is a symbol that Austin uses throughout the novel to refer to cavemen and their habit of drawing bison on the walls of their caves to record history. To Austin, the bison was a symbol of the earliest recorded history. At the end of the novel, however, the bison reappear, a sign that history is repeating itself.

Black Thing in a Globe

The black writhing thing that Austin and Robby first saw in a sealed globe in Johnny's office was called the Contained MI Plague Strain 412E. This plague was unleashed on the town of Ealing, Iowa when Tyler Jacobson dropped the sealed sample onto the part of the pavement in Grasshopper Jungle where Robby had bled on the pavement earlier that day. The black thing symbolized the beginning of the end of the world.

Pink Plastic Flamingo

At first, Austin and Robby believed the pink plastic flamingo they found on top of the roof of the Ealing Mall was just a yard decoration. They later learned it was an instrument that alerted a warning system that the 412E plague had been released.

Grinning Lemur Masks

Austin and Robby found one of these lemur masks on top of the roof of the Ealing Mall. They later learned the masks were instruments that had the ability to alert the wearer if a person they were around had been infected with the plague. These infected people would glow red when looked at through the masks.

Xanax Pills

Both Robby and Austin's mothers take Xanax pills. The shape of these pills reminded Austin of blue kayaks. He believed the pills would help him to find answers to all of his questions. He took one when spending the night with Robby but the answer the pill helped him find wasn't the one for which he'd hoped. Austin also realized that to achieve the level of serenity he imagined the pills would give him, he'd have to take them forever.



Eden Five Needs You

Eden Five Needs You was a movie that Austin and Shann watched together. Although the movie was made nearly 50 years after Dr. Grady McKeon created Eden, the movie had strange, almost eerie, similarities to The Eden Project.

A Teletype Machine

What Shann thought was a noise caused by a rat typing on a typewriter in the wall of her room turned out to be a teletype machine hidden in the wall. The machine was sending out a warning that the plague had been released into the world. This teletype machine was a direct connection to Dr. Grady McKeon.

A Saint Kazimierz Medal

Johnny gave this Saint Kazimierz Medal to Austin one day in his store. The medal was a symbol for Austin that represented the many generations of the family who had revered the saint. For Austin, the medal was also a symbol of a man who had exercised sexual purity, an idea that seemed unattainable to Austin as he struggled with his own sexual uncertainty. In places in the novel the saint's name was also spelled Casimir.

Unstoppable Corn

The Unstoppable Corn was a significant symbol in this novel as it was from the mold produced by this corn that the Unstoppable Soldiers were created. Additionally, the corn, which has the side effect of testicular disintegration, was given to various countries and country leaders by the United States as it was known that the corn would leave them without the ability to reproduce.

Robby's Blood

Because Robby's blood provided a host for the plague, the creatures created by the plague believed that Robby was their God. They were afraid of Robby because his blood had the ability to kill them. This blood represented a form of salvation.



Settings

Ealing, Iowa

Ealing, Iowa was the fictional town in which this novel was set.

Grasshopper Jungle

Grasshopper Jungle was the name that Robby and Austin gave the field through which they had once ridden their bikes before Ealing Mall was built there. The two still referred to the area as Grasshopper Jungle even though the field was gone.

The Roof of Ealing Mall

Austin first allowed Robby to kiss him on the roof of the Ealing Mall when they went back there to retrieve their shoes and skateboards that bullies had taken from them and thrown on the roof. Also, the two find a pink plastic flamingo and a lemur mask on top of the roof, things they learn later came from McKeon Industries and had been made to help identify if there was a 412E infestation and which people had been infected. The remaining two reels of the five-reel Eden Introduction film series were also located on top of this roof.

Del Vista Arms Apartment Complex

Del Vista Arms Apartment Complex was the apartment complex where Robby lived with his mother. It was at these apartments that Austin realized he loved Robby just as much as he did Shann and in the same way that he loved Shann. It was also here the Robby used the paint gun pellets filled with his blood to kill the bug that had been Hungry Jack.

The McKeon House

The McKeon house was the huge mansion built by and lived in by Dr. Grady McKeon. It was on the registry of history places in Ealing. Shann and her family had just moved into the house when the novel began. It was in the walls of Shann's bedroom in this house that Robby and Austin found the teletype machine telling them to go to the silo because the 412E plague had been noted in the atmosphere. During construction of Eden, the house had connected directly with the underground shelter. After Eden was completed, the entrances from the house were sealed off.



From Attic to Seller Consignment Store

The secondhand store From Attic to Seller Consignment Store was the store owned by Johnny McKeon. It was located in the Ealing Mall. Austin worked at the store part-time. One night while looking for the shoes and skateboards some bullies had thrown up on the roof of the store, Austin and Robby broke into the store and discovered the strange and gruesome things that Johnny had stored in his office. Among these things was a globe with the contained 412E plague inside. Grant Wallace and his friends stole this globe of plague material from Johnny's office that same night.

The Silo aka The Eden Project

The Silo, also named The Eden Project, was a huge underground shelter built by Dr. Grady McKeon to house a new generation of people. Although the shelter could have been used as a bomb shelter, the doctor actually intended it to be the place to house a new generation of humans if the 412E plague ever broke out among the public. Years after Dr. Grady McKeon's death, his step niece and her friends, Robby and Austin, discover the shelter. They, along with their families, took up residence there after the Unstoppable Soldiers took over the Earth.

Amelia Jenks Bloomer Park

Amelia Jenks Bloomer Park was where the family of tourists stopped to eat their lunch. The family had come to Ealing because they were on a road trip visiting places where serial killings had been reported. The family became some of the first victims of the Unstoppable Soldiers.

Kelsey Creek Bridge

The Kelsey Creek Bridge was the place where Ollie Jungfrau attempted to kill the bug that was Travis Pope by running into it with his minivan. The bug was not affected by the impact. He ate Ollie. Later Robby and Austin watched as the bug who was Tyler and the bug who was Travis ate the two National Guardsmen posted on that bridge to ensure people would evacuate Ealing to Waterloo. Robby and Austin shot these bugs with the paintballs filled with Robby's blood, killing them.

Themes and Motifs

History

History was a central theme in the novel, as Austin not only recorded the history of his own life but also that of his ancestors. He used the information he learned about his ancestors to make connections between his life and the lives of those who came before him. Austin also took his role as a historian seriously. He strove to tell the truth and make his history free of conjectures and suppositions. In the end, he feared he might be subjecting those whom he writes about to failure as history tended to repeat itself despite the attempts of historians to avoid these repetitions.

Austin begins his story by noting that even though humans dutifully record their history, hoping future generations will learn from their mistakes, people seem to make the same stupid mistakes over and over again. Austin felt he was called as an amateur historian and strove to truthfully record what happens to him during his lifetime. It was fitting that the end of the world comes during Austin's life and he was able to record the last days of life on the surface of the Earth.

As Austin dealt with the end of the Earth, he was also an average teenager trying to come to terms with his own identity. He had done much research on his family and can follow his father's side of the family from his great-great-great grandfather's decision to leave Poland all the way to his father's decision to stop smoking and become Lutheran so he could marry Austin's mother. Through the generations of his family, each member had some aspect of their life that connected with Austin's life. His great-great-great grandfather, for instance, found great comfort in Saint Kazimierz. He believed it was this saint who was responsible for saving his life when the train upon which he was riding derailed. Decades later, Austin's boss gave Austin a Saint Kazimierz medal he'd found in an old jewelry box. Austin wore the medal and soon believed the saint was watching over and protecting him as well.

Later in the novel, Austin discovered a Nightingale Urinal had been installed in an underground shelter named Eden, which was found by Austin and his friends. Austin's great grandfather had been responsible for creating and selling these Nightingale Urinals. Years later, Austin's grandfather was the first person to be infected with Dr. Grady McKeon's plague 412E. He was the first Unstoppable Soldier.

Notice that as Austin records the history of what happens to him, Robby and Shann during the last days of life on Earth, that he continually assures his reader that his is telling the truth. Truthfulness seemed to be very important to Austin. Even when his girlfriend asked him if he'd experimented sexually with Robby, he told the truth. The only time it is known that he has lied was when he told Shann's parents that he and Shann had slipped off for a game of bowling when they'd actually had sex.



In order to keep his stories true, Austin notes that he even tries to avoid conjectures, or the act of making assumptions about the way something might have happened. Austin did not like assumptions because he knew these assumptions could change through the years until they were no longer known to be assumptions but instead considered to be the truth. One of the specific incidences where Austin refuses to make assumptions deals with the National Guardsman who became infected with the plague. When Austin and Robby looked at this man through their lemur masks, they knew he had been infected, but have no idea how he might have come in contact with the plague. It is while writing about this incident that Austin decides it's best not even to try to make a guess.

As Austin contemplates history and the act of writing down one's history he begins to wonder if it isn't the written record that dooms the people to keep doing the same stupid things. All of his life, he's blamed the people for their own actions but at one point wonders if the repetition doesn't begin with the act of recording what happened in the first place.

Sexuality

A major struggle for Austin as the novel progresses was the challenge to come to terms with his own sexuality. Austin had a girlfriend whom he loved and to whom he was sexually attracted. However, he also felt sexually attracted to Robby, his best male friend. In the end, Austin decided not to choose between the two.

Robby, Shann and Austin made an unusual threesome as Robby was homosexual, Shann was heterosexual and Austin was apparently bisexual. Robby told Austin when they were in the seventh grade that he was homosexual. Austin wasn't bothered by his friend's admission. In fact, Robby had helped Austin by teaching him how to dance, and then introducing him to Shann, the girl that Austin liked. Ever since Robby taught Austin how to dance, however, Austin has had strange feelings for his friend.

These feelings intensified when Robby asked Austin for permission to kiss Austin while they were on the roof of the Ealing Mall, retrieving their shoes and skateboards after some bullies threw them on the roof. Austin realized he enjoyed Robby's kiss and might like for him to kiss him again. Austin began at that time to realize how sexually confused he was since he felt sexually attracted to both Shann and Robby.

Austin tried to talk to his father about his sexual confusion. His father, however, seemed to misunderstand Austin's question and acted as if his son was talking about science experiments instead of sexual experiments. Although he'd like to talk to his older brother about his confusion, Eric was away serving in the war in Afghanistan.

A climax came when Austin spent the night with Robby. The two drank and Austin took one of this mother's Xanax pills, hoping it would help him relax and come to a decision. The next morning, Austin realized that under the influence of the pill, he'd been much



more comfortable with his attraction to Robby than he hoped he'd be. He avoided Robby for a few days but finally the two reconciled.

Austin was again put in an uncomfortable position when Shann recognized that Robby was in love with Austin. He couldn't lie to her when she asked if they'd ever experimented with one another. Shann was angry with and disgusted by both of them. Later, Austin and Shann had sex with one another as they were each caught up in the emotion and stress of what was happening on Earth. Shann got pregnant from their one-time encounter. Austin remained confused.

In the end, Austin admits his is still torn between his love for both his friends, but had decided not to make a decision between them. He chooses to live alone in a room with his son. He notes neither Shann nor Robby are happy with the arrangement, but Austin seems content with his decision.

Humor

Dry humor, wit and word play abound in this quirky novel about the end of the world. As Austin strives to tell the truth about what was happening around him as the Earth was taken over by six-foot-tall praying mantis like creatures, it is proven that in some cases the truth is more humorous than anything that can be made up, especially when the truth deals with made up circumstances. Rich similes that refer to the agricultural lifestyle of the upper Midwest are also common.

Dry humor is characterized by the idea that what one says is unintentionally funny. For instance, the chemistry teacher's comment that the Unstoppable Soldiers on his lawn were "big fucking bugs." The chemistry teacher found nothing funny about the situation and was probably scared out of his mind by what he was seeing when he called them this. He was simply stating the facts and for that reason, the statement gets a chuckle because he was describing them exactly as they were.

The author also enjoys playing with words and using the multiple meanings of the words to add humor to his writing. Austin, for instance, refers to anything that might help him to come to a decision about his sexual orientation as "experimentation." Of course, the same term comes into play when talking about the scientists at McKeon Industries and their experimentation. Austin writes at one point that the scientists "experimented" with corn. Since that word has been used so often in the novel to describe sexual experimentation, the reader's mind automatically settles on that track. Austin even admits he may have to delete the line about the experimentations with corn as he finds it disturbing.

Finally, the novel is full of rich simile that the author uses to describe different aspects of the novel. Often these similes deal with agricultural terms. In reference to Johnny and Grady McKeon being born with 25 years between them, Austin heard a hog farmer say "in Iowa, folks liked to spread out their children like dog shit on a dance floor" (30). In another, the bug that was Eileen was described as being as "fertilized as a genetically



modified cornfield in Kansas" (211) In another the activities at McKeon Industries where "a series of catastrophic accidents of nature sprang up like milkweed in well-watered fields of Iowa corn" (283).

McKeon Industries

The story of McKeon Industries was a comedy of errors as the company leaders strove to create a force of Unstoppable Soldiers. The McKeon Industry scientists were led by a man described as a psychopath who was hungry for power and money and didn't care what he had to do to get it. Decades later, the town of Ealing as well as the Earth as a whole was adversely affected by the research the scientists did.

When McKeon Industries was first mentioned in the novel, the company had just gone out of business, leaving nearly half the people in the town of Ealing unemployed. The plant had produced showerheads and toothbrushes, but the manufacturing lines had been sent overseas where labor was cheaper. Through a series of unintended discoveries, Austin and his friend Robby learned the plant had a background of gruesome and unethical practices that personally affected Austin as his grandfather was killed during one of the experiments.

The experiments at McKeon Industries began innocently enough with scientists trying to come up with a type of corn that insects wouldn't eat. If insects wouldn't eat the corn, there would be no need for insecticides and farmers wouldn't have to worry about losing their crops to pests. The insects were probably smart not to eat the corn that was produced, as testicular disintegration was a side effect for those who ate even a small portion of the vegetable. Dr. Grady McKeon enjoyed giving the corn as gifts, knowing the outcome the people to whom he gave it, like the pope and the prime minister of China, would suffer. The Department of Defense learned of the experiments being done at McKeon and contracted with the company to produce an Unstoppable Soldier.

In their misguided experiments, the scientists at McKeon experimented blindly until they stumbled upon a concoction where they blended the mold produced from the Unstoppable Corn with human blood. This mold, which they called plague 412E, caused the humans who came in contact with it to hatch into huge man eating bugs who only liked to eat and have sex. The only way to kill the bugs was to shoot them with the blood of the same human used to create the plague. Those who had been infected with the plague but hadn't hatched out yet could only be kept from hatching out by cutting off their heads. When Robby and Austin learned about the inmates upon which McKeon Industries experimented upon and cut off their heads to keep them from hatching out, and then discarded the bodies in area fields, they realized it was McKeon Industries that was responsible for a string of decapitations thought to be the work of a serial killer in 1968.

The train wreck that was McKeon Industries came back to haunt the people of Ealing when some teenage boys got their hands on a glass globe containing a sample of the plague and happened to drop it onto of a spot of pavement where Robby had bled



earlier that day. These boys, along with three others, were infected with the plague. Unlike the infestations in the 1960s that were kept inside the McKeon plant building, these victims hatched out in public. Robby and Austin raced to learn how to use Robby's blood to kill the Unstoppable Soldiers but they were too late to save the world, as unbeknownst to them, a female had laid an egg mass that hatched out into hundreds of Unstoppable Soldiers, far too many for them to kill with Robby's blood.

Saint Kazimierz / Religion

Although it was a minor theme in the novel, Austin also struggled with a disjoint he felt in his religious beliefs. In his research, he had learned that many of his ancestors were Catholic. He, however, had been raised Lutheran because his father changed religions when he married Austin's mother. Austin struggled with his disbelief in God along with his attraction to one particular saint to whom he related.

Although Austin had been raised in the Lutheran Church and even attended a private Lutheran school, religion didn't seem to play a big role in his life. Going to church was portrayed as a chore one was expected to do instead of something one did because they wanted to. Austin even admitted several times in the novel that he didn't believe in God. He wondered at Connie Brees' act of calling out for God when they saw the National Guard soldiers eaten by the bugs. Austin thought it made no sense for her to call on God for help as He was the one responsible for allowing the evils to be set loose upon the world.

As he details his history, Austin writes about an ancestor who wore a Saint Kazimierz medal. This man, his great-great-great grandfather, believed the saint had saved his life when the train upon which he was riding derailed. When his great-great-great grandfather died on the boat trip from Poland to America, he was buried at sea wearing his Saint Kazimierz medal.

Austin related to Saint Kazimierz because the saint was a young man, like Austin, and also because he died a virgin. As Austin struggled with his own sexual issues he was impressed by a man who was able to have enough control over himself to remain a virgin. It was for this reason that Austin chose Saint Kazimierz as his role model and the figure to which he prayed for protection and gave praise.



Styles

Point of View

This novel is told from the first person point of view of Austin Szerba. As Austin tells his story he refers to himself as “I” and the group of he, Robby and Shann as “we,” pronouns used in the first person point of view. As the novel is just as much about Austin’s emotional struggles with his sexuality, his religion and his past as it is about the end of the world, it is appropriate the story be told from his point of view. If it were told from the viewpoint of any other character, or by an omniscient narrator, the story would lose its focus on Austin and the importance of his struggles. This point of view helps the reader to closely identify with Austin as he leads them through his life and the struggles he faced.

Although the majority of story, with the exception of the epilogue, is written in the past tense, it strangely has the feel of being present tense. Austin writes his story after the end of the world, when he and his friends have taken up residence in Eden. He combines with his story not only the things that he and Robby witnessed, but also the things he had learned from other people and from research about what had happened in Ealing since the bugs had begun hatching. The epilogue is written in the present tense, nearly five years after the end of the world.

Language and Meaning

One of the most significant things a reader notices about the language in this novel is the cyclical nature of words and phrases used. By cyclical nature, it means that certain words and phrases are used over and over again in a way that seems to connect different sections and ideas in the novel. By using words and phrases in this way, it strengthens the idea that everything in history is connected and that history tends to repeat itself.

One of the phrases used multiple times in the novel is the phrase “it was not a good idea.” This phrase is typically used to indicate a person was about to come to an unfortunate ending. Experimentation is another word that is used frequently in the novel. Austin experimented sexually. McKeon Industries experimented with corn, blood and semen. Volcanoes and explosions also fill the novel describing both an actual volcano exploding in Guatemala and Austin’s own personal “volcano” exploding. Austin additionally stresses that he doesn’t lie, that his history is truthful. He doesn’t lie to Shann when she asked him what sort of experimentation he’d done with Robby. The only time he willingly lied was when he tried to tell Johnny, Wendy and Robby what he and Shann had been doing while all the others were in the medical clinic.

Another of the significant things about the writing in this novel is that the style is short, almost brusque. The sentences are short and the paragraphs are short. There are few



contractions used in the novel, perhaps a sign of Austin's hate of abbreviations. The writing is full of simile, particularly with objects and occurrences being compared to agricultural items.

Structure

This novel is divided into four large parts plus an epilogue. Each part of the novel is divided into several small sections, each one given a label title but no numbers. These titles are generally repeated at some point in that small section so in a way, they give an idea what the section is about even if the meaning is sometimes cryptic. The reader can often only understand the significance of the title after they have read that accompanying chapter. Some of the sections are very short with one being only a few sentences while some sections span several pages.

Each part of the novel covers a specific time span in the lifecycle of the plague that was being unleashed on Ealing. Part 1 ends with the plague coming in contact with Robby's blood in Grasshopper Alley and the infection of the first victims. Part 2 tells the story through the night when Robby and Austin witnessed Hungry Jack hatching out in the cornfield. Part 3 covers the story through Austin's discovery that his grandfather was the first of the Unstoppable Soldiers. Part 4 details Austin and Robby's attempts to save the world through their realization that too many of the juvenile bugs had hatched to allow them to do so.

Austin tells his story in the past tense but he covers the story in a way that sometimes moves backward into the past for background information and sometimes forward into the future for needed details but generally stays on a linear track. Shann probably described Austin's story telling process best when she told him, "I love how, whenever you tell me a story, you go backwards and forwards and tell me everything else that could possibly be happening in every direction, like an explosion. Like a flower blooming" (106).

The author also enjoys playing with words throughout the course of the novel. One example of this comes when Austin writes about the scientist who was killed when he shot Dr. Grady McKeon's sperm at one of the Unstoppable Soldiers. This man's last name was Fuchs. Austin describes the place the man came from as being "full of dumb Fuchs" (289). Also, when the chemistry teacher, who was high on meth, saw the bugs he referred to them as "big fucking bugs" a description that is amusing because it fits so well, especially when paired with Austin's follow up statement that big bugs having sex were exactly what the teacher was seeing.

Quotes

But even though we dutifully archived elaborate records of everything we've ever done, we also managed to keep on doing dumber and dumber shit.”

-- Austin (Part 1: Ealing paragraph 3)

Importance: Austin is obsessed with history. One of the things that he's noticed about history is that even though humans write down their history with the intention of not making the same mistakes, they seem to continue to do even dumber things.

I didn't realize then, in seventh grade as I was, that the time, and the eruptions, and everything else that happened to me would only keep getting more and more confusing through grades 8, 9, and 10.

-- Austin (Part 1: Ealing; Robby's Volcano paragraph 11)

Importance: Sexual frustration was a problem for Austin as he struggled between his love for his girlfriend and his love for his best friend, Robby. In this quote, he wrote that he didn't realize things would continue to get more confusing and frustrating as he got older.

It wasn't a lie; it was an abbreviation.”

-- Austin (Part 1: Ealing; Curfew paragraph 6)

Importance: Even though Austin doesn't like abbreviations, it didn't stop him from telling his parents an abbreviation of truth when he told them what he planned to do with Shann and Robby the night they broke into Johnny's office.

Where the glass globe with the fish, shrimp, plants, and worms outside in Johnny McKeon's shop emanated a placid, almost hopeful aura, this thing whispered of rot and death, disease.

-- Austin (Part 1: Ealing; Two-Headed Boy paragraph 26)

Importance: Austin contrasted the glass globe with the contained world of fish, shrimp and plants with the globe that contained the black mass in Johnny's office. He realized that black mass was nothing good even before he knew what it would do.

The position of the jars made an artistic statement about what happened to boys who masturbate.

-- Austin (Part 1: Ealing; Two-Headed Boy paragraph 39)

Importance: Austin compared the placement of jar containing a pair of praying hands next to a jar with a penis in it to the praying hands over the urinals at his school. The praying hands were placed in the bathroom to remind boys what they should be doing with their hands.



Grant and his friends were the first victims of Contained MI Plague Strain 412E.
-- Austin (Part 1: Ealing; Hell Breaks Loose paragraph 28)

Importance: When Tyler dropped the glass globe containing the black mass, he and the boys he was with were contaminated with the plague, making them the first victims.

I placed my palm on the cool curve of the glass. / The boy inside twitched. / The movement was so slight. Just a jittering spasm of the fingers. But I saw it."
-- Austin (Part 2: Waterloo Cornfield; The Boy in the Glass paragraph 28)

Importance: Austin watched as the boy inside the glass jar in Johnny's office moved inside the jar. He later learned that the boy was alive and had been created using Dr. Grady McKeon's sperm.

When you didn't go to church in Ealing, sometimes it was almost necessary to stick a sign in your yard asking forgiveness from your neighbors.
-- Austin (Part 2: Waterloo Cornfield; An Awful Lot of Math paragraph 2)

Importance: Church attendance was expected in Ealing. Austin explained how Shann and her family had to tell others they were busy moving in to get an excuse from church.

THE FLAMINGO ALERTS ON ENVIRONMENTAL PRESENCE OF 412-E. SILO GENERATORS NOW ACTIVATED. REPORT TO THE SILO WITH PROPER HASTE.
-- Words from teletype machine (Part 2: Waterloo Cornfield; An Awful Lot of Math paragraph 32)

Importance: When Austin and Robby broke into the wall in Shann's bedroom, they discovered a teletype machine that was printing out this message every six hours. Although they didn't know it at the time, the teletype machine had been set to warn Dr. Grady McKeon that the 412-E plague had been set free into the environment.

Then Pastor Roland Duff got out, straightened and brushed off his trousers, shut the door, and entered the Tally-Ho!
-- Austin (Part 2: Waterloo Cornfield; And Here's Number Five paragraph 13)

Importance: Austin and Robby are shocked when they saw the headmaster of their school, the man who lectured Austin about masturbation making one turn into a homosexual, going into a homosexual bar as if he'd been there before and was comfortable with the place. This sighting proved the pastor did not practice what he preached.

I don't care if you're queer,' Robby said. 'Queer is just a word. Like orange. I know who you are. There's no one word for that.'"
-- Robby (Part 2: Waterloo Cornfield; Taking Drags paragraph 9)

Importance: Robby made the point to Austin that people are made up of so much more than just their sexual orientation.



Everything fell into place, all right. But things dropped so hard the entire world broke.
-- Austin (Part 3: The Silo; School Prayers paragraph 1)

Importance: Austin felt his world had been destroyed by the way he had acted around Robby when he been drinking and taking drugs. He was completely relaxed at that point with his attraction toward Robby. He wasn't sure how to handle his realization that he was indeed sexually attracted to Robby and maintain his friendship with both Robby and Shann.

In a way, Krzys Szczerba made me and my brother. When you think about it, Krzys Szczerba's factory was still in full operation, and we were his modern-day Nightingales.
-- Austin (Part 3: The Silo; Modern-Day Nightingales paragraph 28)

Importance: Austin considered himself and Eric as people that had been pissed upon, especially since Eric had been injured in Afghanistan. He called himself and his brother modern-day Nightingales as his great-great grandfather had made urinals by this name and had also made the brothers.

None of us had any way of knowing it at the time, but Robby Brees and the bloody message he left on the pavement at Grasshopper Jungle had just as much to do with the end of the world as old, dead Dr. Grady McKeon ever did.
-- Austin (Part 3: The Silo; Some Kind of Sign paragraph 12)

Importance: Had Robby not left his blood on the pavement of Grasshopper Jungle, the plague would have had no substance in which to come to life so it could infect people.

History often loops around into complete circles.
-- Austin (Part 3: The Silo; The Dragon Parade paragraph 51)

Importance: One of the themes of the novel is history and the way it repeats itself regardless of the human race's intent to act differently. Austin points out that although people would strive to change human nature, they often only repeated the actions of the past again and again.

In truth, the silo called Eden went all the way into the foundation of the McKeon House, and the doorways in Shann's room had been bricked off when the Eden Project work crews finished construction on Dr. Grady McKeon's subterranean shelter.
-- Austin (Part 3: The Silo; Gideon's Breeding Rights paragraph 2)

Importance: The mystery of the blocked up doors in Shann's room was solved when the teens realized Eden was so big that it stretched all the way back to the house. The doors had once led to different levels of the underground shelter but were bricked up when construction was completed.

That was because those particular reels were up on the roof at Grasshopper Jungle. They were there when we found a plastic flamingo with a steel spike coming out of its ass, a grimacing lemur mask that makes your face stink, and two bottles of wine, one of



which Robby and I drank on Monday night in his bedroom at the Del Vista Arms.
-- Austin (Part 3: The Silo; Movie Night In Eden paragraph 27)

Importance: When they realized the last two reels of the Eden Orientation Series films were missing, Austin realized those were the two reels that he and Robby had seen on the roof of the Ealing mall.

If you have arrived within the window of infestation, then you may be able to halt what will invariably be the end of the world.

-- Dr. Grady McKeon (Part 3: The Silo: The Good Doctor Accounts for History paragraph 54)

Importance: Dr. Grady McKeon instructed those watching his films how they could go about stopping an infestation of Unstoppable Soldiers if they worked quickly enough.

The scientist who was feeding the human blood host to 412E, who also happened to be starting an initial infestation event, looked exactly like my father, Eric Andrew Szerba.

-- Austin (Part 3: The Silo; Three of Five paragraph 57)

Importance: As Austin and Robby watch the final two reels of the Eden Orientation Series, Austin realized one of the scientists looked like his father. It turned out that Felek Szerba, Austin's grandfather, had become the first Unstoppable Soldier.

It was because Robby Brees was God to the Unstoppable Soldiers.

-- Austin (Part 4: The End of the World; Clickety, Clickety paragraph 16)

Importance: Because the blood Robby had dripped onto the pavement in Grasshopper Alley had allowed the plague to grow and spread, he was considered their creator. Austin and Robby later learned that being shot with Robby's blood was the only way to kill the bugs.

The scientists who worked for Dr. Grady McKeon didn't seem to be overly concerned about consequences, like how to stop shit once they made it unstoppable, and shit like that.

-- Austin (Part 4: The End of the World; A Most Soothing Showerhead paragraph 9)

Importance: In this quote, Austin pointed out how bad the people at McKeon Industries were at thinking in advance about their projects.

And they cleaned up their failures as sloppily as they did everything else, which accounts for the discovery of headless corpses in fields around Ealing, Iowa, in 1969.

-- Austin (Part 4: The End of the World: Serial Killer USA paragraph 30)

Importance: Through his research about McKeon Industries, he learned that the company was responsible for the string of what was thought to be to work of a serial killer in 1969.



Robby Brees really was a superhero. / I did not even think about my mother and father until Robby told me he wanted to rescue his mother.”

-- Austin (Part 4: The End of the World: The Right Kind of Cigarettes to Smoke Just Before You Kill Something paragraph 47)

Importance: Austin realized how truly special his best friend was when Robby told Austin they needed to get his mother and take her to Eden with them. Austin compared his friend’s line of thinking with his own. He hadn’t even thought about his parents and their safety.

PICTURE THIS IF YOU CAN: / Robby Brees and I, wearing fur-covered, full-head grimacing lemur masks that helped identify Unstoppables, smoking cigarettes and dressed in matching form-fitting blue-and-white Eden Project jumpsuits, as we carried fully automatic paintball rifles slung over our shoulders. And we were accompanied by a sixty-pound golden retriever that could not bark.

-- Austin (Part 4: The End of the World: Rat Boys from Mars, and an Unfortunate Incident Involving an Inflatable Whale paragraph 1)

Importance: Although Austin and Robby were dressed as they were in an attempt to save the world, the author’s way of describing what they looked like was an example of a dry sense of humor. You’d think it was a joke, but the author was completely serious in his description.

As Shann Collins, who was pregnant with a strong Polish boy who was going to be named Arek Andrzej Szczerba, cried on her bed, a volcano called Huacamochtl in Guatemala exploded in a massive eruption that blacked out the sun.

-- Austin (Part 4: The End of the World; The End of the World paragraph 30)

Importance: Even though Shann and Austin had sex only once, Shann got pregnant the first time. Her baby, who would help to start the new generation of humans in Eden, was contrasted with the destruction caused by an erupting volcano in Guatemala.

At the exact moment Robby and I drove away with Louis, Connie Brees, and Ingrid, my golden retriever, in the backseat, I decided that I was going to become a Catholic, like I was always supposed to be — like all the Szczerba men always had been.”

-- Austin (Part 4: The End of the World; The Intergalactic Bug Cops paragraph 12)

Importance: As Austin helped to save Robby’s mother from the Unstoppable Soldiers, he decided that he wanted to change his faith to Catholicism, as all the men in his family had been up until his father had changed his faith to Lutheranism.

If there really was a God, I thought, why would Connie Brees want to lay her claim to a deity that unleashed Unstoppable Soldiers on human beings caught on a bridge above Kelsey Creek in Iowa?

-- Austin (Part 4: The End of the World; The Battle of Kelsey Creek Bridge paragraph 31)



Importance: In this quote, Austin asked the age-old question: Where was God when bad things happen? In this case, he wondered why Connie would call upon God to help her when He was responsible for the trouble in which she found herself.

Here is what the end of the world looks like: / It looks like a child running out into the road, eyes focused only on some destination ahead — the future, which is on the other side — and the child fails to notice the speeding truck that is there, on that same road, in the present.”

-- Austin (Part 4: The End of the World; Great Big Jar paragraph 26)

Importance: Austin described the end of the world in terms of a child being hit by a car. At the time, he and Robby had thought they had really run over a child in the armored vehicle in which they were driving. In reality, they had run over one of the newly hatched baby bugs. These new bugs really signify the end of the world, as there were too many of them for the boys to kill with the paintballs containing Robby’s blood.

Sometimes it is perfectly acceptable to decide not to decide, to remain confused and wide-eyed about the next thing that will pop up in the road you build.

-- Austin (Epilogue: Lucky, A Cigarette Run, and the Bison paragraph 19)

Importance: Throughout the novel, Austin had struggled to come to a decision about his sexual orientation, as he was sexually attracted to both males and females. In the conclusion, he came to the decision that it was acceptable for him to stay confused.